

Deng sisters to open for second ChamberFest concert on June 14

by Rory O'Donoghue



“We’ve been playing together since we were kids – well, not that we aren’t still kids,” 11 year-old violinist Corina Deng said, laughing, in a telephone interview last Friday. She’ll join her 16-year old sister, pianist Athena Deng, for a special performance at 7:15 pm before *In Full Swing*, this Friday’s 7:30 pm ChamberFest concert in Kulas Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music. For

the two young musicians, familial ties are the secret to their success.

“As sisters, there’s something about our communication that’s really special,” Athena said. “We don’t have any filter in telling each other our real thoughts. Usually at the end, we fully understand what the other wants.” The duo will perform Ravel’s *Tzigane* and Dvořák’s *Romantic Pieces*, Op. 75 (Nos. 1, 2, and 3), which they both agree will be an excellent opportunity to showcase their respective talents.

“I like both of the pieces very much, even though they have very different auras and selves,” Corina explained. “*Tzigane* is extremely virtuosic and full of unique characters, while the first and third of Dvořák’s *Romantic Pieces* are calm, almost recalling a distant memory. The second piece stands out most to me, because it’s fun and bubbly.” Although both selections feature challenging parts for violin, Athena is similarly excited. “These pieces don’t feel like I’m just accompanying. We’re both playing equal roles, because the piano part is very challenging as well. Both pieces are super fun.”

Athena began playing piano at age four because her mom Freya always listened to classical music, and their family had an upright piano at home. “I was born into music,”

she said, “and later I was inspired by one of our family friend’s daughters to get really serious about it.”

“It was sort of the same thing for me,” Corina said, “only, I was about one or two. The other kids around my neighborhood would come together and play music, and I would be in a corner feeling left out.”

“One day, when Corina was two years old, I was watching her on the playground,” Freya added. “She put a big leaf on her shoulder and tried to play it like a violin. We bought her a very small 1/16th size violin, just as a toy. But when she took it, she said, ‘Mom, I need a violin lesson now!’ She got serious very quickly.”

The girls both attend CIM’s preparatory division and laud the program’s “professional” feel. “The chamber music aspect of it is very strong,” Athena said. “We all have fun individually, but we also learn how to play together as a group and express music together.” Athena studies with Stanislav Ioudenitch and Daniel Shapiro, and Corina is the youngest student in Jaime Laredo’s and Jan Sloman’s studios. They also have the benefit of working with musicians from The Cleveland Orchestra, which Corina calls “just wonderful.” This constant source of inspiration has given them a glimpse into their future.

“We both want to be musicians,” Athena said, “not just soloists – we also want to keep collaborating with each other. There aren’t many sister duos out there.” “Yeah,” Corina jumped in, “I would like to be a concert violinist, but I would also love to keep performing together.”

In Full Swing continues after The Deng Sisters open the evening with a robust program of Bernstein’s *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano*, John Adams’ *Shaker Loops*, and Dvořák’s *Piano Quartet in D*, Op. 23. Tickets are still available [online](#).

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