

January 13, 2020

Dear Mr. Cole,

I am an alumna of Hoff Barthelson Music School, where I spent four amazing years from 2003-2007 in the piano, chamber, and honors programs as Mr. Gerald Robbins' student. I wanted to share my Hoff-Barthelson story with you, to accompany a contribution in honor of Mr. Robbins' 25th year at Hoff Barthelson submitted via the HBMS website.

In short, Mr. Robbins changed my life. Hoff-Barthelson focuses on developing potential, enriching lives and creating community, and Mr. Robbins' took that to heart, making it his personal mission for me. While I started piano at age 4, my lessons had always been out of obligation, and when I joined Hoff-Barthelson in high school, I anticipated more dreary weekly routines until my parents gave up and allowed me to quit. Ms. Bergman didn't see it that way though, and fatefully handed me over to Mr. Robbins.

Where I saw stagnation, Mr. Robbins saw potential, and painstakingly crafted diamonds out of dust. While other teachers watched the clock like a hawk so as never to work unpaid, Mr. Robbins' passion for teaching defied time and reason. Leading up to performances, Mr. Robbins had an open-door policy at his house. It didn't matter if this was a student recital or the Van Cliburn, he was equally invested. I went from begrudgingly playing one hour a week for lessons to practicing 20+hours voluntarily with Mr. Robbins' support. How could I not put forth my utmost effort, when Mr. Robbins was sacrificing his own time to help me, purely out of goodwill? He encouragingly matched me minute by minute, note by note, to help me reach my full potential - I would have never even dreamed of solo recitals or technical Liszt pieces, but by my last two years at Hoff-Barthelson, both became my reality. Mr. Robbins was determined to prove to me that nothing was impossible and reinforced that belief through limitless dedication to my studies.

It is hard to get a high school student to love classical music, and so Mr. Robbins changed the narrative for me with enriching context. Our lessons were not about picking apart my mistakes, but were adventures in history, drama, and other inspirational sources. Mr. Robbins showed me through his storytelling that music was far more than ink on a page, and my life as a piano student was greatly improved. Knowing composers', editors' and society's efforts to pass down these musical legacies, how could I not take my studies seriously? Mr. Robbins taught me how to discern between different editions of sheet music, compare Debussy to Monet and Brahms to *Gone With the Wind*, and just what made Argerich's Mozart so special. I learned to write my own program notes and express my own evangelism of music. Even when I cannot play these days, Mr. Robbins' comprehensive lessons have followed me through life - I learned to gain context, be detail oriented, hold myself to high standards, and appreciate culture that's been passed down over the centuries.

Lastly, Hoff-Barthelson has a special place in my heart because Mr. Robbins orchestrated a community for me. He widened my perspective beyond solo practice, encouraging me to join

chamber music, exposing me to peers who added a new source of motivation. I fell in love with music learning and growing with fellow students, and then Mr. Robbins extended this sense of home beyond 25 School Lane. He often invited me on stage with him, where I attended his concerts for free as a page turner, and introduced me to his friends at the Philharmonic. It was such a privilege as a high school student to enjoy concerts and dinners with such high-caliber professionals. To this day, while my day to day focus has changed, Mr. Robbins patiently encourages my musical and personal growth. For over a decade, Mr. Robbins has always been quick to offer a referral, concert invite, or encouraging vote of confidence whenever we speak. To have someone like him in your corner for life, really puts a new perspective on anything, well beyond music.

I will be forever grateful for having had Mr. Robbins as a teacher (turned coach, mentor, role model, friend and cheerleader) at Hoff-Barthelson. The school's budding musicians are deeply lucky to study with him. Hoff-Barthelson's staff is undoubtedly renowned as some of the most celebrated professionals in the industry, but Mr. Robbins adds another layer to this with his dedication to his students. He will give confidence to the timid, purpose to the resistant, and vision to the eager, realizing Hoff-Barthelson's mission for all its students.

Sincerely,

Rose Liu  
Hoff-Barthelson Class of 2007