

Watch: Fourth grader and UNCG student bring musical life to family pride

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Hampton Elementary student Anston Thompson poses with Yunfei Li, a UNC-Greensboro music composition graduate student who created the music for a song Anston wrote. The song is being played by the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra as part of its program to connect with local youth.

UNC-Greensboro

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GREENSBORO — Hampton Elementary student Anston Thompson found inspiration for a short melody while his grandfather was getting better from a heart attack.

"I was thinking about my grandfather, he had a heart attack, but he recovered," Anston said, as shared by his music teacher, Preston Kendall.



Anston took those thoughts and composed a short song, sharing his love for his mother, father and entire family.

Now other students can hear his song performed by the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra.

The symphony and UNC-Greensboro teamed up on a project to showcase the musical work of young students.

Anston's tune caught the attention of judges Alejandro Rutty, a UNC-Greensboro professor, and Evan Feldman, principal guest conductor with the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, who selected it for a special project. Rutty and 14 of his UNCG composition students each created an arrangement of a melody by a young student or group of young students from schools around the region.

The Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, which has been performing the arrangements as part of its elementary concert programs, was another key partner in the project, along with the schools. The group performs concerts to introduce students to the orchestra each year. The concerts reach over 18,000 third and fourth graders across Guilford, Rockingham, Randolph, and Alamance Counties.

The selected student melodies also came from schools across the region: General Greene, Florence, Oak View, Hampton, Morehead, Peeler, Northern and the private Caldwell Academy in Guilford County, Douglass in Rockingham County, Holt and South Graham in Alamance County, Lindley Park in Asheboro, and Franklinville, Level Cross, and Liberty in Randolph County. They were selected from about 86 submissions.

UNCG music composition graduate student Yunfei Li took on Anston's tune.

"When I heard that melody, I was shocked!" she wrote in an email. "How can a kid write a melody like this! That's so amazing."

Li came to the United States about a year and a half ago from China, to study at UNCG. Among other works, Li composed music for the 2015 movie the "Calligraphy Master" and the music for the opera Wu Xing.

She watched from the balcony as Anston took the stage in the Grimsley High auditorium on March 27 for the premiere of the piece. Anston sang out in a clear voice as the audience began to clap along to the rhythm of his song.

Then Feldman struck up the orchestra.

Li's arrangement of Anston's "My Family" uses a C minor scale and some tango elements. There's a brief introduction, then Anston's melody, then a shimmering-sounding, suspense-building middle part before the dramatic theme returns, and then the coda closes it out.

Li said if young people listen to lots of music and learn different instruments, that can help them get good ideas.

"I want to tell children, do not be afraid of composing," Li said. "Everyone can compose music. If you have a melody in your mind, just sing it!"

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Making music together
The Greensboro Symphony Orchestra is performing songs written by local elementary school students that were put to music by UNC-Greensboro composition students.

Child composers: Noah Dobyans, Rowan Davis, Amelia Pike, Jayla Quick, Tim McBride, Anston Thompson, Amaris Goode, August Spitz, Bebe Buchanan, Bella Wells, Lyndsay Lambis, Jamesyn Pollock, Xavier Poole, Bearik Bageelow, Samantha Bachelon, MaKenzie Wright, Daron Ross, Sean Boone, Kailyn Jones, Daphne Melton, Savannah Williams

UNCG arrangers: Alejandro Rutty, Suzanne Polak, Andrew Savage, Nick Rich, Yunfei Li, Xianghui Wang, Asher Sizemore, Indiria Everett, Mark Englebretson, Sharneisha Joyner, Adam Ricci, Robin McLaughlin, Grace Gollmar, Julian Ward, Isaac Ward

Fourth-grader, UNCG student give musical life to love of family
The Greensboro Symphony Orchestra and UNCG teamed up to showcase the musical work of young students.

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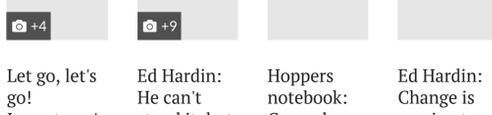
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