

Hello, everyone!

This past Thursday, composer Gabriela Lena Frank joined us in conversation about music and hearing loss. Gabriela is currently the composer in residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra and recently had an article about her process published in the New York Times.

When Gabriela was young, her parents knew something was different because she wasn't speaking, however she was already playing piano on her own. She often copied her older brother, whom she would sit next to during his piano lessons, and would figure out the instrument through its vibrations. No one offered a hearing loss diagnosis until her kindergarten teacher mentioned the possibility to her parents. After she was fitted with hearing aids, Gabriela described the change as "air coming to life." Despite an increase in hearing, she had to relearn what made sense to her after years of using other timbral senses to hear and communicate.

Gabriela credited her parents for being her greatest advocates. They helped her find the confidence to ask for what she needed in a given situation, and then encouraged her to show the benefits or results of that positive accommodation. Gabriela also mentioned that her father was a literary scholar who read to her all the time and helped her develop her speech.

Gabriela discussed her creative process at great length, mentioning that she has perfect pitch and finds tonality in how people are speaking (for example, she said Julianne speaks on the pitch E-flat often). She prefers to compose without hearing aids and feels the music in other ways. Different composition projects will call for different strategies, though, and Gabriela mentioned tactile composition (touching/playing the instruments you use) and not just writing everything at the piano. In parting thoughts, Gabriela said that the great composers heard and hear music all the time. As someone who is hearing impaired, she needs to hear it, see it, and feel the vibrations to make it happen. Thank you, Rob, for making this connection for us!

This week is a home base session; we'll have a handful of updates and discussion.

Have a great week!
Chrysa & Julianne