



LUZERNE
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FROM LUZERNE MUSIC CENTER TO SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY: JONATHAN VINOCOUR'S STORY OF PASSION AND RESILIENCE

Jonathan Vinocour (LMC '93 - '94) is the Principal Violist of the San Francisco Symphony and faculty member of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music whose story was shaped by pivotal choices. Graduating from Princeton University with a degree in chemistry, he later pursued a master's degree in viola performance at the New England Conservatory, studying under the renowned Kim Kashkashian. In this interview, Jonathan reflects on his early exposure to music at Luzerne Music Center, the place where his love for music developed, and his current role as a seasoned performer and teacher. Delving into the intricacies of his career, Jonathan shares insights into his unconventional path, the challenges he faced and the joy of balancing orchestral, chamber and teaching pursuits.

The origins of Jonathan Vinocour's journey into the world of classical music can be traced to the musical pursuits of his twin brother, Josh. Reflecting on his early exposure to music, Jonathan shares, "My twin brother had played the French horn as a kid and got pretty serious about it before I was really that into music myself." Out of the three siblings, it was Josh who participated in Luzerne Music Center first. Jonathan vividly recalls visiting him during his first summer at the camp. "He seemed to be having such a good time, both musically and otherwise, and I got to meet all these other young musicians who were really into music." This captivating atmosphere convinced him that he, too, needed to be part of it.

Motivated by the desire to delve deeper into music, Jonathan applied to LMC the following summer, along with his other brother. As he reminisces about those early days at the camp, Jonathan notes, "It was the first time that I was spending most of the day playing music, whether it was chamber music, orchestra, or having viola lessons." He fondly remembers those summers as transformative. "I think it's where I really started to realize how much I enjoyed playing music, especially playing music with other people." The camaraderie he experienced at LMC, coupled with his exposure to the faculty concerts, set the stage for his future as a professional musician. Jonathan attended the camp for two summers. When asked about the enduring appeal of the camp, he highlights the distinctive quality of LMC's faculty as well as the camp counselors. "They were people who you would just hear practicing in their cabins and they sounded really good. That was inspiring to hear and to work with musicians of that caliber."



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Jonathan paints a vivid picture of life at LMC, from the rustic charm of the old cabins to the weekly camp cleanup. He fondly recalls movie nights, ice cream from the camp store and outdoor adventures like whitewater rafting. Musical memories intertwine with these experiences, with the camp being the place where he participated in some of his first chamber music coachings and where he first tackled Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet No. 4 in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4. "I think that the balance between pretty intensive musical experiences combined with all the sort of normal fun summer camp stuff was really good for a teenager like me." The immersive experience, surrounded by the serene beauty of Lake Luzerne and enriched by recreational activities, marked a turning point in Jonathan's musical journey.

When questioned about LMC's impact on his decision to pursue a musical career, he reflects, "I think it was the first time I started to think about it." The camp provided a rare respite from academic demands, allowing him to focus solely on his love for music. The camp's diverse community, with serious young musicians from New York City and various preparatory programs, offered a measuring stick for Jonathan to assess his own talent. In his words, LMC became the place where he began to wonder, "Maybe I could actually do this."

Jonathan Vinocour's journey to becoming the Principal Viola of the San Francisco Symphony is a testament to the intricate choices and dedicated passion that have defined his career. Reflecting on his college years, Jonathan explains, "When it came time to apply to college or music school, I decided in the end to just apply to universities." Despite the allure of music schools, he opted for a broader academic experience with a plan to explore music alongside other studies. This decision led him to study chemistry at Princeton University, where he continued to actively engage in chamber music and regional orchestras. Transitioning to graduate studies at the New England Conservatory, Jonathan studied with the acclaimed Kim Kashkashian. "I had a career in solo and chamber music in my mind," Jonathan recalls. However, as he delved into substitute roles with the Boston Symphony, his perspective evolved. "I found that I did enjoy playing in a great orchestra," he notes. Following that discovery, Jonathan became Principal Viola of the St. Louis Symphony and just two years later moved to the San Francisco Symphony and solidified his orchestral career.

Acknowledging the challenges in his journey, Jonathan highlights the importance of decision-making. "There have been hard decisions that I had to make about 'Do I do this or that?' I try to just go with it and make the best of it," he reflects. His unconventional path, with a non-music major undergraduate degree, led him to feel behind in his musical development but at the same time offered a unique perspective. "I have felt that I have continued to grow, particularly in the area of my attitude about performing, and how to stay relaxed and not overly self-critical," Jonathan shares, underscoring his ongoing journey of self-discovery.





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Reflecting on his dual role as a performer and teacher at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Jonathan emphasizes passing on the legacy he received from his mentors and the desire to leave a lasting impact beyond his performing career. "I'd like to pass some of that on because it's almost like carrying through some sort of tradition," he notes. Balancing analytical thinking with the physical aspects of playing, he strives to help his students' unlock their true potential.

Jonathan maintains a delicate work-life balance, finding solace in family and nature. "I'm married and have an eight-year-old son," he shares. Embracing hobbies like bike riding in the scenic Bay Area, he finds both solitude and rejuvenation. Nature plays a significant role in his family life, with frequent camping trips and exploration of California's beauty.

In Jonathan Vinocour's story, the evolution from a college student making tough choices to a seasoned musician balancing orchestral, chamber and teaching pursuits portrays a career shaped by passion, resilience and an unwavering commitment to the art of music. Jonathan's advice to aspiring musicians resonates deeply: "For me, it's been very hard to separate the music itself, the relationships that come out of music making, and my feelings, my love of music and love of being a musician." He emphasizes the significance of community and social connections forged through music, sentiments that echo the enduring friendships cultivated during his formative years at Luzerne Music Center. "Nurturing those kinds of relationships is really important."

Jonathan's story offers encouragement to those exploring diverse interests. "I'm a good example that you don't necessarily have to take a totally linear path to becoming a musician." He advocates for pursuing one's curiosities and not adhering rigidly to conventional routes, showcasing that success in the musical realm can manifest through unique ways.

When asked about his and his siblings' generous contribution to sponsor scholarships for LMC students, Jonathan reflects on the generosity that shaped his own musical education and motivated him to give back. "My brothers and I definitely benefited from scholarships all along the way, and that includes LMC."

Jonathan credits his brother Josh for spearheading the initiative. "I think we gained so much because of the generosity of other people, and we just want to try to do the same."

