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# PROVIDING POSITIVITY

THE INSPIRING MUSICAL CAREER  
OF DR. JANICE FOY



WORDS **Corey Whipple**

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COREY AND DR. FOY

Most people can imagine that at age sixty, they would be retired living life a bit more distant from the youth in society. They can predict themselves satisfied with the impact they have made, and go on to relax the rest of their lives at peace. Most would visualize themselves overlooking a lake, reading, and observing nature as time passes. This would be nice but this is definitely not the life Dr. Janice Foy is living. Dr. Foy, a cellist, pianist and senior citizen continues to work and earn her living as a musician to this day. Her journey is one that had a rough start and still by no means perfect, but carries on in her continuing impact on others through her music.

Dr. Foy earned her B.A. and M.A. in Music with Distinction from California State University, Northridge in 1978. She received a Ph.D. in music from UCLA, where she specialized in Ethnomusicology in 1990. It was here at UCLA where Dr. Foy first learned of the struggles inherent in a music career. During this time period, on different occasions, she observed realities in the music industry that were present both within the university and also across the globe. She noticed several trends as several musicians and staff held positions based on demographics opposed to actual talent. This became a peeve for Dr. Foy as she valued the time and effort it takes to build proper technique and skills. In addition to discovering the unfair

university admissions process, she faced discrimination in nations abroad for being an American. People of other nations were shameless in expressing their biased opinions. As a college student, this was discouraging as she was making financial and academic sacrifices to be overseas offering her talent.

Struggles continued after receiving her doctorate. Dr. Foy, like most musicians, is her own biggest promoter, and with that comes the the challenge of funding projects. Their income is based on the luck of gaining a large fanbase. Even more so, it can be much more difficult for classical instrumentalists to gain nearly as much popularity as musicians in other genres. There are also challenges working with particular people, including times where Dr. Foy actually denied her compensation because of the disrespect she encountered. Most of these times were due to conductors who spoke in a disrespectful manner and disregarded her input while still expecting her full time and effort. In this situation, Dr. Foy thinks that the best thing to do is to “bow out,” otherwise the stress will not allow for the highest possible artistic performance.

Dr. Foy states, “If music is made incorrectly with negative vibes, it will come out that way.” She adds, without the musicians, these conductors will be “conducting themselves in front of a mirror!”

At this point in life when thrown consistent disappointments, many people can focus on the negative and let it have a bigger influence on the decisions they

make going forward. It is important to realize that at this point in Dr. Foy’s career she was at a low, where people around her did not appreciate her skills. It took Foy knowing that continuing music is what she needed to do. She soon realized that her music was most impactful in places where people’s voices go unheard and unappreciated—the places where people are forgotten because of their conditions and economic status. She began playing in places like hospitals, shelters, jails, and veteran’s homes allowing her audience to break away from their lives’ troubles for a moment, in the presence of her soothing music. By continuing to perform music, she saw her hand in providing positivity to another person’s life—with that she would be satisfying her destiny.

Dr. Foy says that “Without fail, every time I finished playing works in a more sacred vein, a person would run out of a hospital room saying, ‘My mom just passed. The music was so soothing to everyone. Thank you so much.’” Dr. Foy remarks that after this experience she knew a “higher force” was always present, no matter where she played.

She recalls performing a heartfelt performance for the community of Skid Row at the Winegart Rehabilitation Center when she was a part of the American Chamber Symphony under Maestro Nelson Nirenberg. Despite the perceived disparity in the residents of this community, Dr. Foy and other performers felt that they were all one, especially after seeing the reaction of happiness among the people of this area during the performance.

After acknowledging the positive influence she had, Dr. Foy continued to diligently seek out new and exciting opportunities of collaboration for the sake of bringing music to all, around the globe. She launched her own ensemble, Joyful Spirits. She also currently plays in Symphony 47, a Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra where she serves as their Principal Cellist, External Orchestra Liaison, and Secretary of their Executive Board. Her work in general has given her the privilege to collaborate with some of music's greatest artists such as Yo Yo Ma, Ray Charles, and Herbie Hancock. Dr. Foy has done studio work and recordings for Seinfeld, Rush Hour 3, Friends, Alias, Ghost, and Born on the Fourth of July. She even was called to coach the famous actor Samuel L. Jackson for his role as a cello playing cop in the movie, No Good Deed.

Her work has led to several honorable awards including Certificate of Commendation in 1997 from L.A. City Hall, by Joel Wachs, for her "Outstanding Contributions to Society in the Field of Music." She earned this award for bringing multiple ethnic communities from LA together for a concert. Akin to her efforts in Skid Row, Dr. Foy is one that strives to create the inter-community compassion that is largely non-existent.

Now, Dr. Foy receives her biggest reward from working with youth. She has started several after school string programs in addition to having put on many school assembly concerts in the Los Angeles and Glendale Unified School Districts. Dr. Foy delivers a more fun and engaging style

as opposed to a more strict approach in trying to educate children in Classical music. She feels the youth really benefit from introductions to great music and to various musical instruments, when it is done in a fun and engaging way. As previously mentioned above, Dr. Foy also values proper technique, the training of fundamental musical knowledge, and believes this would go on to produce the best quality of music. Dr. Foy believes that with poor quality music these joyful effects on people would not occur. Therefore, for the sake of music going forward, she incorporates all that she has learned to inspire youth to correctly spread joyful music. She is kept at peace with her musical responsibilities and all that comes with this lifestyle because she knows the effects that music has on herself, her fans and on society.

Dr. Foy's journey and motives reflect perseverance, and is inspiring to the youth of today. The youth of today have no excuse to not pursue their goals despite current barriers. Anything valuable is worth fighting for. We may look at a current battle being fought in doubt of a successful finish, as well as compare our situations to others. However it is critical that we realize that everyone is unique, and we take different routes at different times to shape our lives. We must continue to do what we want to do, at our own risks, to bring confidence and happiness to ourselves. We can then go on to spread positivity to others. Dr. Foy does this through music, but we can all find our own niche and spread positivity in whatever we individually aspire to do. ■