

## Sidesaddle at the Wadsworth

It was a day unlike most others. Yo-Yo Ma was scheduled to give a cello master class at UCLA and I had managed to arrive at Schoenberg Hall in time to catch the final cellist performing the Debussy Cello Sonata. He was petrified. After his performance, Yo-Yo came over and put his hand on the young student's shoulder and said, "What are you afraid of?" His reply, "My reputation."

I was impressed at how down to earth Yo-Yo was in communicating advice and in giving musical suggestions. At the same time, he was intensely friendly. Yo-Yo became "Guru Ma" as he proceeded to lead this young cellist through various relaxation exercises followed by a soothing massage to his neck and back muscles. The session ended with a totally different rendition of the Sonata — much more relaxed and confident. What a transformation in such a short period of time. I was impressed!!

On my way to the music library I bumped into an old professor friend of mine, John Hall. He wanted to know if I would give the pre-concert lecture for Yo-Yo Ma's upcoming solo cello recital at the Wadsworth...in three days!!

I had never worked so hard (maybe only on my dissertation and in its final days). In-between my dad's stroke, the hospital scenario, earthquake repairs and my frenetic music schedule, I studied and wrote like crazy for the "Ma" lecture. It seemed as though nothing could distract me from the upcoming event of the year — me with "Ma" at the Wadsworth!! Come rain, hail, sleet, sickness, insanity, I would be ready for him and for the Wadsworth "hoity-toity."

It was finally the evening of the performance. I wore the sleek short, but elegant, black lace dress I had just bought for this unique occasion. The ensemble was complete with high satin pumps and a touch of green with gold at the neck (to celebrate St. Patrick's Day).

Balancing on my satin stilts and moving about two inches per step in my latest fashion statement, I slowly proceeded up the Wadsworth stairs and up to the stage lectern. I moved to the backstage area where I immediately made myself at home and feverishly began pouring over my lecture notes. A few minutes later I heard my name being called from offstage. "Will Janice Foy please come to

the front of the stage. Yo-Yo Ma wants her to play his cello so he can test the hall's acoustics."

Here was my golden opportunity to play for one of the world's great cellists and what was I wearing!?! I pinched myself hoping that maybe it was just one of those cello nightmares. The time it took me to register where I really was I found myself already on stage and face to face with the great, "Ma."

His warm, gracious smile and kind manner caught me by surprise even though I had already seen him in action. "Play anything you like," he said as he sauntered out into the theater. Before sitting down, which seemed like an eternity, I asked Yo-Yo, "What kind of cello do you play?" When I found out his instrument was a 1733 Montagnana I said, "Not bad at all."

My moment to shine had finally arrived. I very gingerly and gracefully brought the cello to one side, kept my satin stilts on tiptoes and proceeded to play the beautiful melody of "The Swan." What better choice than to convey elegance and beauty of tone in a very awkward and embarrassing situation. I heard of getting into tight spots but this was ridiculous!!! (Remember, my reputation!) Amazingly enough, Mr. Ma said, "You find talent in every corner of this city." He was impressed! Anyway, he made me feel like he was impressed.

While we were talking backstage before the lecture, I asked if he would sign his autograph on my lecture notes. He obliged, writing: *To Janice, thank you for the best sidesaddle playing ever.* Y.Y. Ma, 3/17/94

We had a good laugh over that. I made it very clear how embarrassed I was and apologized profusely. He didn't seem to mind in the least! His warmth, generosity, wit, humor, and humanitarianism are the qualities I will never forget and appreciate much more as life and my career go on.

— Janice Foy, Ph.D.

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## Requiem

Mrs. Ellen Bruce passed away on April 17, 1995. She was the last of the remaining founders of the Saturday Conservatory of Music at Cal State LA. She will be missed.

— Margaret Asato

