

Music or English: My Search for a Career to Use Both

Shiori

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At the author's request, the name of the school is given with the express permission of her parents and the school.

Shiori's Profile

Favorite Japanese words and Osaka dialect words

ありがとう (*arigatou*, in Osaka intonation), めっちゃ (*metcha*, an Osaka dialect word meaning "very")

Favorite foreign words

Maori: *kiora/kia ora* (hello), *kia kaha* (be strong). *Kia kaha* is a word I will never forget. My friend wrote it in her letter to me.

English: awesome, appreciate

"Awesome" is a word I learned from a friend from England. I thought it sounded really cool.

"Appreciate" is also a wonderful word that I like.

What I want to do when I have time

Hang around with friends, visit friends overseas, rent the rest of "The O.C." television drama series, go shopping, play my favorite music, study foreign languages, study abroad, and go singing at a karaoke with my friends.

Favorite composers

Schumann, Beethoven, Bach

Both music and English are important to me. I practiced the piano from the age of four. When I was in fourth grade, a friend invited me to attend English-conversation school with her, and I've been studying English ever since. The school focused on conversation, and it was really fun. I've also been influenced by school dramas from English-speaking countries like "The O.C." I love how open the schools there seem, with no strict rules like we have in Japanese schools, and students being allowed to drive cars to school. I also love the way they speak English—though it's perfectly natural since they're native speakers. When I watch these dramas I often fantasize about what it would be like if I could live in such a world.

Choosing a High School: Music or English

There was a time, after I began taking English in junior high, that I didn't like the English classes in my school at all. All we did was study from the textbook, and that seemed really boring to me. In my second year, though, thanks to a good teacher, I began to enjoy English classes again. This teacher taught not only out of the textbook but introduced us to everyday expressions using worksheets prepared just for us. That teacher's fluent English and Spanish made me wish I could speak just like that. I really began to love studying English after I met that teacher.

When I entered junior high, I joined the swimming club^{*1} because it had more days off than the other clubs and that meant I could continue practicing piano. I was able to do both my piano lessons and swimming practices during my first year, but it

was really tough because I continued my English-conversation school classes and also attended a cram school in the afternoon. I finally reached my limit just as my second year began. While the swimming club had a rigorous practice schedule from early spring in preparation for summer competitions, I was also facing a piano competition and a concert by the students in the piano class coming up in the summer. I would not be able to practice enough if I continued both; it would have been too physically exhausting. For me, swimming was just a hobby; I decided that what counted to me in my future was music and English. Once I convinced myself of that, I quit the swimming club.

Then I began to seriously consider whether to apply to a high school where I could focus on studying English or whether to aim for Yuhigaoka High School, where I would major in music. I still had not made up my mind when other students began sending applications for high school entrance exams in our third year of junior high. My homeroom teacher was very caring, and gave all us students thoughtful advice on our plans after graduation. That teacher's advice one day gave me the push I needed: "You can study English later if you still want to. If I were you, I would try for Yuhigaoka High School." I knew that if I quit piano now, I wouldn't be able to do it better even if I wanted to later. I decided to study music in high school, and continue studying English on my own.

Studying Music

In the music department at Yuhigaoka High School, students study various aspects of music in piano (my major), vocal music (my minor), music theory, music history, and so on. There are plenty of opportunities for concerts, and there is also a study abroad program to Vienna. In piano lessons, students are re-



Shiori has a one-on-one piano lesson once a week with her teacher at school.

quired to truly understand the music at its deepest level when performing a piece. For example, I learned that even the process of using the pedals is different, depending on what the player wants to express. The teacher would often ask me what I was trying to express at a certain point while I was playing the music. Before high school, I had always thought that I was giving my best in my piano lessons, but now that I think of it, I did not really give any thought to expression at the time. I only began to realize how deep music is after I began studying in high school. I learned the joy of music, and I wanted to learn more.

Friends I Met Through Music

The classmates I got to know in the music department in high school are really special. One day, I suddenly couldn't go on playing in the middle of a piano test. That experience made me scared of performing in front of people, and it happened right before the piano competition. My classmates, guessing the fear that gripped me, suggested trying to play in front of a volunteer audience. I accepted their suggestion and tried practicing in front of classmates after school, and that helped me to pull myself together. I took part in the piano competition, and I did all right. That's what fellow musicians will do for you, I realized. Friends in junior high were fun to just hang around with, but my classmates in high school are people who share their love of music, and who are striving together to get better at what they are doing. Seeing how hard everyone around me is studying encourages me to do my best, too.



Shiori with classmates in the music department.

International Exchange in Yuhigaoka High School

I didn't know until after I entered Yuhigaoka High School, but I soon found out that it has vigorous English-language education and international exchange programs. Lucky for me! Many exchange students come to our school from different countries—both for short- and long-term stays. During my second year I became an officer on the international exchange committee, where I was in charge of the planning and the managing of the welcome and farewell parties for the exchange students. Also during the summer of my second year, I took part in the English study abroad program to New Zealand. I had participated in programs for overseas training organized by my English conversation school and others, going to countries like Australia several times, so I thought to myself that for me the purpose of this trip should be different from other students taking part who would be going abroad for the first time; I should make an active effort to speak English as much as I could.

The school in New Zealand had a special class set up for the students from Yuhigaoka High School, but I asked the teachers to let me take part in the classes of the student who was my buddy^{*2} during our stay. He turned out to be a very busy student who was also a school leader, and he sometimes didn't seem to be that interested in getting to know me. I ended up not getting to know him very well partly because I found it difficult to catch what he said. I felt sad that, while watching him talking with his friends, I couldn't join in, even if I wanted to because I couldn't speak smoothly. I thought that if I could speak English better I could have been on better terms with him. Even today, when I look at his picture, my determination grows to study harder so that I can talk better to him the next time I see him. Of course I did make some one good friend with whom I still keep in contact. When I write to her before a concert about how nervous I am, she replies saying "Be confident and do your best!" My Japanese friends encourage me too, but when someone overseas says something like that, you feel a special connection and it gives you a lot of courage. I think back to the days I spent with the friends I met in New Zealand every day. That experience was something very special in my life.

I Want to Work Using Both Music and English!

When I was choosing which high school to attend, I thought I had to make a choice between music and English, but after I came to Yuhigaoka High School, I fell in love even more with both music and English. Now I want to aim for a career in which I can be engaged in both the music I treasure and the English I love, and teaching at the same time. I got interested in teaching because of my second year English teacher and my third year homeroom teacher at junior high. Like them, I want to become a teacher who can have a positive impact on the lives of students. After graduating from high school, I am thinking of studying to become a teacher.

^{*1} Most Japanese secondary schools have clubs students can choose to join and take part in after classes are over. School clubs are diverse, for all varieties of sports, arts, music, theater, science, language learning, computer, volunteer, and so on. Each club has specified days for practice and activities, and members of most clubs spend about two to three hours practicing each day.

^{*2} At the New Zealand school the Yuhigaoka High School students were paired up with buddies who showed the Japanese students around the school, had lunch with them, and took them out after classes were over. (The lessons taught were mainly ESL.)



Photo album Shiori made to introduce herself in New Zealand. It includes photographs of her family, her life at school, topics about Japan, and of her trips to other countries.