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**Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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Interviewee: Andy Lin  
Interviewers: Helen Pu, Chelsey Wen  
Date/Time of Interview: Feb 10, 2020  
Transcribed by: Helen Pu, Chelsey Wen  
Edited by: Kelly Liao  
Audio Track Time: 1:21:41

Background:

Andy Lin was born in Kaoshiung City, Taiwan in 1984. He started playing music at a young age, picking up many instruments throughout his childhood. He moved to the United States to continue his music education at 13 years old and from there started to focus on viola under his mentor Donald McGinnis. Lin continued his education at Juilliard and SUNY Stony Brook and has built his career playing both viola and erhu. Currently, Lin both teaches and performs. In 2010, he started the New Asia Chamber Music Society to give Asian artists a platform and present a blend of Western Classical music and Asian music. Lin was part of the Amphion String Quartet for several years and is currently part of the Taiwanese Junior Chamber of Commerce. In the interview, Lin also discusses his ideas regarding the future blending of Western and Chinese music.

Setting:

The interview was conducted in a study room in Fondren Library on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Key:

**AL:** Andy Lin

**CW:** Chelsey Wen

**HP:** Helen Pu

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off, pause

*Italics:* emphasis

[Brackets]: Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

(?): Unclear word or phrase

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Interview Transcript:

**CW:** Yeah. Okay, so today is February 10, 2020, and we're here interviewing Andy Lin. I'm Chelsey Wen, and I'm here with Helen Pu. So the first question is when and where were you born?

**AL:** I was born in Taiwan, Kaohsiung City in 1984. October 11, 11am.

**CW:** Um so how long did you live in Taiwan?

**AL:** I lived in Taiwan until I was 12 and then moved to the States.

**CW:** Um can you describe the household that you grew up in?

**AL:** The household I grew up in. Well, I started, when I was born, I was in Kaohsiung, in a like two floors building and first floor was my dad's office and second floor was where I was living in. But I was only there for about two years. And then my family moved to Tainan. And then we were in, we moved a couple times. Both times were in single buildings, like about like three, four floors. And by the time I started to remember things, we were in a building that's about five floors. And we had about five rooms. I was in my own room. My sister had her own room and my parents too. And yeah what else, in like, how the building looks like?

**CW:** Or like how was your neighborhood and the community that you lived in?

**AL:** Well Tainan is a very low key and not very fast paced city, at least when I was growing up, and people are very nice. We don't, we walk around. We do a lot of motorcycles, but not not Harley, not a fast one. And it's very humid hot. The community is very, it's very—people are very nice. You walk you walk out the street or out of your house. People always say hi to you and they chat with you. It's very slow paced. It's more like a suburb, but not quite.

**CW:** Um what were your parents' occupations?

**AL:** My mom is a housewife. She helps with my dad, and my dad is—there's no English for her, his job. It's a dai shu. Dai shu basically means he does a notary. And he can also do some. He's not a lawyer, but he can do documentary. He can do divorce documents, marriage, real estate, but he's not lawyer. Does that make sense?

**CW:** Yeah, that makes sense.

**AL:** I think that's the only job that—Taiwan is the only country that has that job, that occupation, and he was one of the first person to get it in Taiwan.

**CW:** Um so what were some of the values that your parents emphasized when you were young?

**AL:** They want us to be happy and for them, earning money is not the most important thing. It's funny, my parents are very open-minded, at the same time they don't want us to—well I have, I have a sister, and they don't want us to become lawyers or doctors. They think the life is not healthy and, and just being a human being they feel—they just want us to do what we want, and how we started music was because they think music is important, art is important for—for the children, and that's how we started learning music and later on we came to the States to further pursue musical studies.

**CW:** Were they also musicians?

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**AL:** No they were not, and I think it's also because some of my family member from my, from both ends were lawyers or doctors and the life wasn't that successful, in terms of marriage and happiness, so I think that's what they try to avoid, me and my sister to become. Interesting, right? From Asian parents.

**CW:** Yeah, um, so what subjects interested you in your early school life?

**AL:** I loved math although I suck at it right now, but I'm not very good at history. I'm not very good at biology or chemistry or anything that requires remembering dates and names but I like when I have to figure out equations or numbers, and I think that's how I—I think that helps with music, in general, and I love sports. I don't—I know I don't look like one but—

**CW:** [laughs] So when did you start playing instruments?

**AL:** I started when I was 6, on the piano, and 6 and a half on the violin, and when I was between 8 or 9 I picked up viola and erhu, and when I was 12 I picked up gaohu, and between all those years I was practicing all the instruments, but I was majoring in violin and minor in piano until I came to the States where I decided to focus on viola, and I brought the erhu with me to the States. I was about almost 13.

**CW:** So your parents introduced you to it? Did you already have an interest in it before that?

**AL:** Um well it started with my sister. She started—she's two years older than me, and she started piano when she was four, so it was around two. When we were growing up there was a slogan from Yamaha, it's a, it's a music, it's a music school, music department, and they sell pianos and digital pianos to, you know, to people, and it says in Chinese, 学音乐的小孩不会变坏, basically means kids who studies or learn music will not, will be, will have good discipline, and will be good kids, and that's how we started music in the—initially.

**CW:** So why did you pick viola when you moved to the States, to focus on?

**AL:** Um well that's a long story. Well I—I, when I first came to the States, I was a double major in violin and viola. I had my first viola lesson with Donald McGinnis, from USC, University of Southern California, and he—he's a very well-known performer and teacher, so he really, he really liked my playing. So he wanted me to just focus on viola and not bother to do anything on the violin, so he told the school not to give me any violin lessons, and our violin, school of violin teacher back then was just a local teacher, so the school obviously wanted to listen to, you know, someone who has a bigger fame and who has more power. So I never had any violin lessons after I learned it in the States. And you know when you are around like 12, 13, you are like, “Oh, that's great, one less instrument to practice.” So I think slowly I just, um, never really learned the violin anymore. I still do play, but I started to focus on viola only afterwards.

**HP:** What's the difference between violin, viola, and like why did your teacher not want you to play the violin anymore?

**AL:** Well vio-vio-viola is a very, it's not a very popular instrument, at least like 20 plus years ago, and so when you are a violist and are good like my—my former teacher, you have the pride. And when you see someone who has the potential, who has the talent, that he thinks I can become a very good violist, of course he wants me to, you know, keep me as a violist, but not to do anything on the violin. And well

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violin—it's smaller than viola. Musically it's about fifth higher than the viola, so viola the—each instrument has four strings and the viola has a fifth lower than the violin and it's an octave higher than the cello, and it's—we play the same way, we hold the viola and the violin the same way. We hold the bow the same way, but it's a bigger instrument, and the tone is lower and it's a little thicker, yeah. It's harder to play. Just imagine like fingering system and, and everything's the same, but everything's—you need to make more effort. That's why it was, it's not a popular instrument since it's very difficult to play well.

**CW:** Um so can you talk more about influential teachers that you had growing up?

**AL:** Growing up? Mm any teacher or my private teachers?

**CW:** Any kind of teacher.

**AL:** That's difficult because I find all the teachers very influential. Um I guess my first violin lesson basically influenced me the most because I was with him for about, about 6 years, and I want to say he's a good performer, and he's probably just an okay teacher [CW laughs] but he's great I love him. [CW and HP laugh] But um he knows what the students need and he—maybe it's, maybe it's not the quickest way, but um he makes us practice. So I remember when I was in Taiwan still, he has—he owns a building, not a building like about five floors, tall building to himself, and he teaches in one of the rooms, and there are five other rooms, and like including the lobby and stuff. So when you go into a lesson, if you didn't play well, in some passages, he will make you stay in one of the rooms to practice by yourself, and when you feel like you are ready, you go to the—his room while he's probably teaching another student. You play for him, and until he think you are ready to—ready for that passage, then you can go home. Sometimes it can take hours, sometimes it can take like fifteen minutes it depends. And also, if I have a competition coming up, maybe the competition is on a Sunday, I go to his—his house on Saturday, from like 6 am—I will eat first, I will start practicing until like noon, I will eat, I will take a nap, I keep practicing, and he's—he's there if I have question or if I need to play for him, or I just go to him, so that's basically how I grew up as a musician in Taiwan. So, he got me to practice a lot in—in a very subtle way.

And after I came here, to the States, well Donald McGinnis, the the the one who make me, converted me to be a violist um was also I guess he's my first teacher in the States, and the way he teach, the way he teach of course is very different from the Asian way, he's more—well I I guess I have to say throughout my years, all the teachers happened to be there at the right time. Donald McGinnis was basically someone who think you should be a soloist, so everything he told me to do is play more, play louder, don't worry about anything just, just do it, just do it.

And when I got to Julliard, my very first year, I was studying with Michael Tree, and he—he passed away a few—few years ago, he's a chamber musician, a violist from the Guarneri quartet, and but he was also a very accomplished soloist, but his mindset is about chamber music, so everything is very very detailed. Um, I remember my first lesson with him I basically went through two lines of music, two lines can be—it's only like about eight seconds, and the entire hour we were just focusing on every single note and I was with him for two years, two years, and I went through maybe like four pieces. Where the next two years I was with Toby Appel, he's—he—his teach, his teaching style is very free, and—and he's also very nice, he thinks everything you do is correct, but he'll tell you what he thinks, but you are free to do anything you want. So I've gone through like four five pieces in one semester, and so by the, by the end of my college life my repertoire list increased a lot, the last two years compared to the first two years.

And then in my master years I had another teacher Hsin-Yun Huang, who's also Taiwanese, and she—she's almost a combination of all three, he—she's very strict, she's very strict, she's an amazing soloist and an amazing chamber musician, so and she's also scary from time to time. She's always smiley and she's very

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nice, but, you know, she's sitting there will give you so much pressure, if you listen, I'm like nervous as hell [all laugh]. And then I got into my doctorate degree. I had a teacher Kathy Murdock for one year and then Daniel Panner for about a year and a half, and there was another teacher I never studied with, and because when you're in your doctorate degree, you don't always need to take lessons, at least for where I went to school at. Yeah they were all very influential to my life, but of course there are other artists, like Itzhak Perlman who I had a chance to work with him quite a few times, he—his personality his way of thinking as a violist, as an artist, also influenced—influenced me quite a lot, and there are a million others.

**CW:** So when did you—or how did you decide to focus on erhu?

**AL:** Mm, well erhu is an instrument I started when I was almost nine, and...I don't remember when I started, when I wanted to focus on erhu, but because it's an instrument I grew up with. And when I came to the States, I brought it with me because, you know, it's a very different instrument and I feel like it's something I don't want to give up, but at the same time I didn't really have time to practice, especially when you are in high school, you're—you're in a new environment, new country, new language, everything's new, and so it was basically sitting in my room doing nothing. And I remember my first time I took out the instrument and played for my friends in high school, they were all fascinated because many of them have no idea what this instrument is, unlike nowadays a lot of people know, but twenty three years ago, I don't think, I think like eighty percent of Americans probably don't know the instruments. And so I had a chance—a few chances to perform in high school and I always get great feedbacks and people always loved it and like a lot of applause.

So when I came to New York, I also brought it here with me and they are just, um, a lot of opportunities in New York especially because there are a lot—lots of Asian communities and they always seek for some Asian element instruments or music, folk music, Chinese, Taiwanese, anything. So I had a lot more opportunities to, to perform the instruments, and I think not until about...Wait let me think, I came to New York in 2002 and in 2005 I actually started teaching erhu at a Chinese cultural institute in—Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was teaching there for about ten years, and I had a lot of students. I have about like, the most I had was like fifteen students and then later on many students graduated so I—I ended up about seven before I stopped teaching there, and and just throughout all those years, I had a lot of opportunities to perform to collaborate with Western musicians with some classical instrument musicians and then about the past five ten years the instrument become popular in the States, so there are a lot of composers that want to write for the instruments, so I started to get better gigs, better concerts, better paying opportunities.

I remember my first concerto appearance on the erhu was with Milwaukee symphony. Milwaukee symphony is the top twenty orchestra in the States. And I got a phone call from the orchestra manager about two days before the concert, beca—I was recommended by one of my friends, a violist friend who was playing the orchestra. They had this piece of, for solo erhu in orchestra but the soloist they hired, I don't wanna say who it is, um couldn't read the notations, the western music notations, and she—he he also c—didn't know how to follow conductors because growing as a Chinese musician, or playing Chinese music, um, the experience—experience is very different from classical trained musicians. And so at the end, even the assistant conductor need to be next to him and say “Oh you coming here, you coming there.” And aft—at the end, they—the conductor, the conductor just didn't think it would work, so like they flew me in there the day before the concert, I had one rehearsal, and then dress rehearsal on the day of and then it's the concert, and there were two concerts.

So that was my first concerto experience with orchestras, and from then, I think I started to practice more because, first I feel those opportunities are very precious, and it feels great to play with orchestras, it—because it feels like you are a real soloist and you can actually make it as a soloist on the erhu in the

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States, where I don't think anyone would think that would happen in the States, like ten plus years ago. So and then I started to get solo requests from the Metropolitan Museum and many other foundations and— and presenters. And from then, I had soloed with orchestras about almost ten times on the erhu, and I think now, now I think it's one of my, not one of my, but viola and erhu are my focus for my career.

**CW:** So when you first came to America were you able to find mentors that could help you with erhu, or was it you mostly developing it by yourself?

**AL:** Right, I developed myself mostly in the States, but when I go back to Taiwan every summer or every break, I would take lessons from my former teacher, but I don't think I had any lessons for the past ten plus years, ever since I moved to New York actually.

**CW:** Um, can you kind of describe also how the erhu is different as an instrument from other string instruments, I guess?

**AL:** You mean other Western string instruments?

**CW:** Yeah, yeah.

**AL:** Well erhu has, the biggest difference, it doesn't have a finger board, so where on the violin viola cello, there's a finger board, so when you press down the string, that's basically the note. It's like a, you know, unlike guitar, you have frets, and it stops the string so the, so the pitch doesn't move unless you move your finger around. But since there's no finger board, so it's about how much pressure you put on, put on the string, so even by tiny little bit, it's gonna change the pitch, that's why people say it's—the erhu is very hard to play in tune, and also it's—it has a very human kind of quality, voice quality since—since the sound doesn't, it's not flat, it has a lot of tone even within one pitch. Yeah, only two strings, you can't play double stops where on violin, viola, cello you can do double stops, you can do chords, and I think those are the biggest difference. And also the bow, the western bow it's a little more stiff because it's made of wood, where erhu bow is made of bamboo, it's very stretchy, you can stretch it and it doesn't break. Yeah, I think the most important is that the tone quality, the tonality is very different. Do you want to know more details? [all laugh] It would take forever.

**CW:** I think that's good for now. So how do you think the difference in how the instrument is played translates into the difference between Western and Eastern music?

**AL:** You mean, what—what do you mean?

**CW:** Um like you said the pitch is harder to control, or how do those differences show up in the different styles of music?

**AL:** Different styles of music, um well I guess, it's very hard for erhu to play with other instruments just because it's—it's harder to play in tune, so when you're out of tune, it's—it's very obvious. But at the same time because the unique sound it has, when you are playing with like say with a string ensemble, or when I was playing with orchestras, you can really hear that distinct, um, sound from the erhu, where it's very—it's like from a different world, that's why people nowadays actually write erhu with western instrumentation and not just the erhu also the pipa, guzheng, they have a lot of combinations of— combinations of the two cultures nowadays. Um but, your question was, your question was...

**CW:** Sorry my question was hard. I was just asking how you see how the, the differences between the instruments are shown in different styles of music.

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**AL:** Well, I can, obviously because it's also a string instrument, so I can play Western and Classical music on the erhu as well, of course it will sound different, the style will be different, the way the approach will be different, but you can hear it's the same music. But it's just like when you use a trumpet or flute to play a violin repertoire, it just sounds different but you can still tell by what the music is.

**HP:** Do you think like playing Bach or Mozart with an erhu will change the tone of the piece?

**AL:** I think so, well erhu itself the sound is actually very sad, it's not, it's definitely not something that will make people happy if you just listen to the sound. So playing the Bach at least—if compared to Bach is, um, in the beginning you probably couldn't tell it's Bach, just because Bach is something very holy, you know, it's it's simple but at the same time you can't—it's very, it's the most—the most basic in music in terms of harmony, the chords, and also how he writes the music. And so using erhu to play in the beginning you might feel, what you feel, you probably won't feel like it's Bach, it's [CW: Different.] It's hard to explain, maybe we can come back to this [all laugh].

**CW:** Um so can you tell us which college you went to and when you graduated?

**AL:** Uh I went to the Juilliard School of Music for my undergrad and masters. I was at—I was there from '02 to '06 for my undergrad degree and '06 to '08 for my masters degree, and I went to SUNY Stonybrook for my doctorate degree and I finished in 2015.

**CW:** So were you set on going to Juilliard or did you have other options you were looking at?

**AL:** You mean did I—was that the only school I auditioned?

**CW:** Was that your top choice?

**AL:** Mm I didn't really have a top choice, I guess my former teacher Donald McGinnis gave me a lot of confidence so he told me I can get into probably all the schools I wanted to audition. So I didn't have, I didn't think about that many options. The options I had were um USC where he was teaching at, where he already promised that I would get in with full ride, and then Juilliard and also another school called Lynn, Lynn University in—in Florida. I was auditioning there because the viola teacher came to my high school for master class and I played for her. I really enjoyed her teaching and she also liked my playing a lot so she invited me to go to the school to, for the audition. And then there was also Curtis Institute, where it's a very small conservatory in Philadelphia, so those are the only four schools I auditioned for my college year to, for—for my college. And—and I got into, hang on let me think, right, so—but I know I wanted to go to Juilliard or USC um those were the only my—only two top choices. And after I got all the results, I was thinking if I want to stay with my former teacher any longer. I was with him for five years already and so I was discussing with my parents, we thought maybe going to a new place is nice and New York, and Juilliard has a, has a big name. And so I decided to go to Juilliard after all, just for the name of the school also I find that would be a lot more challenging for me.

**CW:** Um so when you moved to America was the primary reason for you to pursue music?

**AL:** Yes, well well the high school I went to was an international arts high school, so basically the oldest students there were mostly international students. They are all in any sort of arts. We had dance, theatre, music, jazz, fine arts, film, and so when my parents decided to send me and my sister to the United States, basically just means that, you know there's no going back, music is what you're gonna do. And so I never thought about doing anything else when I was growing up.

**HP:** So your parents stayed in Taiwan?

**AL:** They were in Taiwan, just me and my sister were in the States. But my sister came two years before I did because the school was from eighth grade to twelfth grade, so basically it's like second year in middle school in Asia, so that's when we—well she's two years older, so she left after her first year in middle school, and two years later I came after my first year in middle school.

**HP:** Was it like a boarding school?

**AL:** It is. There are only three international arts high schools in the States, and Idyllwild Arts Academy, that's where I went, was one of them. And there's also Walnut Hill and Interlochen.

**CW:** So is your sister also a musician?

**AL:** She's a pianist, yeah. [**CW:** Okay.] And she—actually we play all the same instruments which later on she decided to focus on the piano, and then I'm on the strings, the string instruments.

**CW:** Mm so I'm assuming your parents were very supportive of your decision?

**AL:** Pretty much, and the—[**HP:** Was there—Oh go ahead.] No, no, I mean they have no other choices [all laugh]

**HP:** Was there any point in time of your life where you didn't want to do music but your parents kind of like pressured you or you felt pressure from your parents?

**AL:** Not really because I really enjoy music and I—I know I can also try other things but music will still be my focus in life and actually my grandparents, my dad's parents, they are the people who really don't like us playing music, they want us to become doctors and lawyers. They're very traditional way, and even as I got into Juilliard, one of the hardest schools to get into, my grandparents still told my parents and me that if you decide to go into medical school, they will pay for everything, they just want me to give up music. But I was like “No, it's not gonna happen.” [all laugh]

**HP:** I guess now moving into like your career, so like after all your school, so why did you decided to get a doctor's in musical arts?

**AL:** [laughs] Well actually all those things actually tied up together, like I guess coming from an Asian background, a doctorate degree is always important like, you know, degrees are important. And although I don't find it very useful even until, even until now, but I know if I, one day if I decided to teach at a school, if I want to become a professor, that doctorate degree is gonna be—it's very important. And if one day I decide to do something in Asia, people look at your resume, people look at, you know, what your, what your highest degree is, and also since my grandparents they really disagree in, you know, in us, or at least me because I am the guy, and to—to learn music, I think getting the doctorate degree will make them feel a little better, and also I needed the visa to stay in the States back then, so I was like “Okay, I will do it.”

**HP:** What was your like first job, I guess, as a musician?

**AL:** Um, that's also hardest question to ask a musician because, you mean the first concert that we get paid, or the first student that we taught?

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**HP:** I guess, first—I don't know. [all laugh]

**AL:** Right because, being a freelancer our first job is when we first got our paycheck, right? Which I don't remember when, and probably when I was still in school, and right, I really don't remember when—but I know I started teaching private students when I was 21, I had my private students. But I don't remember when I first got paid for my first concert. Also I have school, which I don't remember.

**HP:** Do you still teach students?

**AL:** I still do, I have—I teach about ten hours a week.

**HP:** And how old are they?

**AL:** Um right now, the youngest she is about 8 and the oldest, he is my age. Yeah, but my youngest ever was a year and a half, and the oldest ever was like 74, but that—that the guy was learning erhu.

**HP:** Um so we saw that you're part of the New Asia Chamber Music Society, can you tell us a little more about that?

**AL:** About the society itself? [**HP:** Just the society.] Well, because of my background and my profession is on both Western and Eastern, um, instruments and music. So well I guess I should talk about the history of our New Asia CMS first. Um we, the organization was founded in 2010. Uh with me and three other friends, mu-musician friends, and we got together, we were all still in school. And we're all trying to figure out what we want to do, you know, in the future and what's more meaningful, other than just performing. So, we thought about, oh, let's start it a group where we can present our own concert, we can find sponsors, we can actually invite people who we enjoy playing with, to play with us. And that's how we got started in the, in the very beginning. And—but the first few years because we were also finished finishing up, finishing up schools, and will have different goal in life.

So we only had like a handful concerts a year. Sometime we get invited by different communities. And—but we did find sponsors for our first Carnegie Hall appearance in 2011, which was a was—was, which was a great success. And—but after that for about five years, it's basically just like a pickup group. And I had a professional, um, String Quartet called the Amphion String Quartet. Um we were doing very well for about eight years, and we disbanded in 2016. And that's actually—that's a big change in my life.

And so I was thinking, if I should focus on what—because those eight years, I was basically focusing on the quartet only. Most my—80% of my concerts on are with the quartet, and so after the quartet disbanded, I need to find a way to survive in New York. And I was thinking, what else can I do besides just teaching and getting more concerts, but getting concerts takes time to build up. Um, so it's like, “Oh, New Asia Chamber Music Society still there. Maybe I should think about how to run it more professionally and more seriously.” So, by then, um two people has, two of the founding members have left the group: one got married, and one went back to Taiwan. **So just left me and Nan-Cheng, one of my 学弟 (classmate) from—from school from, for many years.** And so we decided to gather some friends who are not musicians to host our first, uh, Benefit Gala.

That was, uh, 2016 the last the year after my quartet disbanded. Um, um so because throughout the 15 years in New York, I have met a lot of friends, and also have performed many different community, um, concerts and met a lot of people in New York in general. And New York is very small, but you get to network very easily. Um so, when I reach out for help with sponsor donations, I actually got a lot of great

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feedback and a lot of support. So the first gala we did in 2016, it was at the Yale Club in New York. We actually raised um \$80,000 for the very first time for first year. And after that I heard from many friends that usually the first gala people—it's either you break even or you actually lose money. But we were very lucky that we got a lot of support from—from our fans and and supporters and the community people.

Um right, so I'm sorry, I went it kind of went out of the way. So the New Asia Chamber Music Society, our goal, we have three missions. The missions has been changing every year. But the initial mission besides we want to promote, uh, Asian artists as musicians but also want to create a new voice, the new voice being when you go to a concert, it's not just about Western classical music is not only going there to listen to Chinese music, or go over to see a dance performance. We want our audience to come to a concert and you learn different aspects in different cultures. So you come in you—you—you heard classical music, you heard um Asian music, you also see Asian dances. Or sometimes—sometimes we collaborate with uh modern dance in the States as well. So we want to create a new culture where people could go to, go to a concert, they can learn a lot more than just one thing. And that's how we got—first got started.

And we also want to create a platform where we can help the new generation, including ourselves to get more opportunities to perform. Because we know it's hard for so many musicians to find opportunities to perform. And if we can create that platform for people, that I think that's something very meaningful, at least in my life, and at the same time, the more you can, um, offer people to perform, more opportunities you offer people, the more opportunities you give yourself, as well because with you building up relationships with other musicians, it's also a give and take and you build up that relationship together. Um, and until now, our new missions are, um, we have a young artist program where we try to, we showcase, um, students when they're mostly teenagers. They get to perform with us, share the same stage, and, and what else...Right and also try to bring the community together. Because every concert when they, every event and concert we do, our audience, they come not only to enjoy music, but they get to social and network with music lovers, with friends, with people that comes. So it's not just you come to a concert, the concert ends, you leave. We have pre-concert mingling, um, hour, and we have long intermissions. And we have after-concert receptions where people can get to know each other more and also to meet artists.

**HP:** So this Chamber Society was founded in New York?

**AL:** We were founded in New York, yes.

**HP:** And then are there other locations now?

**AL:** Um now it's, well we are based in New York and we travel to perform.

**HP:** Okay, are you thinking about, like starting a new one in another place?

**AL:** It's not impossible, but um we haven't thought about it yet.

**HP:** Yeah. Um how have you seen like your New Asia Chamber Society, uh, impact, I guess your community in New York?

**AL:** Mmm. Well, I guess because the programs we do are—we focus on non-musicians for our, for our audience. So we had Between the Bars, it's a workshop. Um it's a small workshop where usually we have about 20 to 30 attendees and they come in to learn any small elements about music. We will pick a topic say “rhythm,” for say, uh “Beethoven” or um “harmony.” So they come in little—we'll use the very simple termi-terminology or we, uh, we speak in a way that they can understand easily even if you're not

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a musician. So afterwards, they leave the workshop they will find they learn something new about music, and later on when they go to concerts, they are not afraid to talk to their friends about what they heard, what they learned, and—and they are not afraid to go to concerts. Here, you know a lot of people, they're afraid to go into a concert because they feel like they don't—they know nothing about it.

And we also have salon concerts, where it's a bigger scale about 50 people. And we also talked about the music and we perform, we demonstrate, and all those things will actually bring the community together and will help people to get to know each other better and get to know the art a lot more. And we are pretty popular in New York. And a lot of people met each other through coming to our events. So I think that really helps with the, uh, the community.

**HP:** Uh like how large of a portion of your life does the society take up now?

**AL:** Um, timewise it's hard to say because it—it—it differs depending on how busy I am and how busy, and what we have coming up. But how important it is to my life, I say, I will say it's about 60-70% of my life because I see a future to the organization. And I'm still thinking how—I think, I'm still thinking how big it can grow. And I have about a five year plan and 10 years plan, where I want to bring the group to, like I like you said, it's not only gonna be New York, I wanted to go to different states, even to different countries. Like next year, I'm gonna go back to Taiwan. I want to bring the group to Taiwan to see if we can do something over there.

**HP:** Do you ever think you're gonna just focus your entire time on this society or?

**AL:** Um probably not. Because I think my life although like I said, um music is a big part of my life. It will always be my primary focus. But I also want to do community work. I'm a part of the, um, Taiwanese Junior Chamber of Commerce of New York. It's, uh, an organization I, me and my friends we—we established in New York, and we do a lot of community service and also a lot of business networking events. So to me, um, giving back to the community, not only with music, but with, uh, my resource and the connections I have with people. That's also a big part of my life, what I want to do.

**HP:** What are some different community service projects you've done?

**AL:** Um, let me think, well, we do, um, or through through the Taiwanese Junior Chamber of Commerce of New York, we hosted a parallel event of a United Nations SDG High[-Level] Political Forum, ourselves, United Nations, and because want to, we also care about SDG, about sustainable development. And that's one thing that we do once a year. And we also have lectures on different, um, industries. You can go from uh FinTech to medical to health, to health care, to arts and culture, as well as uh real estate. So all those things, we try to host those lectures, and people can come to learn something they feel less important in their life at that time.

**HP:** What's the age group of the audience for the forms usually?

**AL:** Um, usually it's between, um, early 20s to 40ish.

**HP:** Um who is your favorite Western artist?

**AL:** Western artist?

**HP:** Yes.

**AL:** You mean a musician, right?

**HP:** Yeah.

**AL:** I think I will say Itzhak Perlman. For—for me, my favorite is not or it's not only about how well that person played, or performed, but it's about the character and, and the connection between me and me and him or her. Um, because being an artist, the performance, just listening to the music itself is not, doesn't make that person my favorite. Right?

And, but I remember my first time, I went to Itzhak Perlman's uh summer camp, and that's how he first knew about me and later on, he invited me to perform with him. And the very first rehearsal with him I was super nervous because you know, he's a, he's a big shot and he's probably one of the most famous musician in the 20th century, even nowadays.

And so I was nervous and I'm sure he knew that I was nervous. You can just tell. So he'll, he'll joke around or he'll talk. He talks a lot, he has a great, great sense of humor. And he will find many ways to, very subtle way to co-co- to comfort me, to calm me down. And—and so I really enjoy my first time working with him. I feel like he really cares about the next generation and he cares about music. The way he rehearse is not only about what's on the, on the page, he will use, uh, his personal life to describe how we should treat the music and musically and technically.

**HP:** What about your favorite Asian artist?

**AL:** Um, let me think...I will probably say, uh, Jimmy Lin, Cho-Liang Lin. Also because I have a personal personal connection with him, relationship with him, but also, he has done a lot in the in the music scene, um, for um um, he started different summer camps, some music festivals in Asia, where, uh ,he tried to promote arts or music, classical music to, to the audience to, you know, the Asian community. And for me, that's very inspiring, because that's what I want to do as well. And not only he is the, you know, I was growing up listening to you know his recordings, but also meeting him, playing with him and getting to know him. He also has a great sense of humor. He can talk forever, you know, without any-anyone talking to him. And he also have a lot of, uh, things to share, to—to give to the next generation. And I really like that.

**HP:** Have you ever any—have you ever composed any pieces yourself?

**AL:** I tried, and I failed. And never again. It's, it's just it's a different different part of your brain that you use. And it takes time. I wouldn't say I don't know how, but I prefer to use my time to do other stuff.

**HP:** Um what's like a typical day in your life? What does that look like?

**AL:** Um, people always say I'm like a busy bee. And a lot of people say I'm the—if not one of the but the most, if not the most, but one of the busiest person I've met. Because I—I don't like to do nothing. You know that people they like to chill at home watch TV, or you know, uh, go walk around, I mean I like walking around, but I always need a purpose. For example, like if a—I have a friend come visit, I'll take her or take him around to, uh, to visit different, um, different places. But I like—if you look at my schedule, is, it's by hour, right it's probably like, I wake up, I'll rehearse. And I'll have lunch break, lunch break is usually with someone. It's very rarely eat by myself and then I'll either teach, rehearse, or work. Oh I'll always find things to fill in those empty hours. And oh, I also like to host events. I like creativities.

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I like to not just concerts, but lectures. That's why I'm running both New Asia CMS and also the Taiwanese Junior Chamber of Commerce and I also do a lot of community service, not just through those two organizations. So basically, my days always about music and people and food.

**HP:** Um what has been the most difficult part of being a musician?

**AL:** Um, I guess the unpredictable and the unstable income, right? Because sometimes you can have lots of concerts in—in a week, in a month or sometimes you can have a very few in a month you'll feel like “Oh, okay, I should, I should have saved more money the last month.” Right “Or, or I'll be—or I guess I won't be struggling.” But it will um I'll feel like “Oh, it will be, it will actually be nice if I have a steady income. So I know I don't have to worry about getting more concerts, getting emails with uh new engagements.”

Um, but I think the hardest part about being a musician is, uh, is how do you let people to appreciate music and at the same time to understand it's—it's important to everyone's life because I think making a living as a musician is, it's not the hardest thing. It's—I always think being a musician if you really want to, you can still make a decent living, because you can just teach, you can do...

For—for example um, if you work at a an office, right, your average hourly rate is probably let's say on the lower side probably like, minimum wage is \$15 or \$20, \$25. If you offer lessons for 25 dollars you'll probably get, thousands of students. But most musicians will want—we don't want to teach only to make a living. We teach—we will because, well, to make a living, it's important but we also want to um educate the next generation right, we want more musicians to more kids to learn music. So—so by the same time we also want to make sure we use our time for the music correctly, not only to practice, to perform, but also we would we want to enjoy our life as well. So teaching like working at an office, it's—we don't want, let me rewind a little bit. We don't want to teach because want to make a living. So we don't want to teach like say 10 hours, just like walking in an office. If you do that then you are almost no longer an artist. And so I think it's not impo—it's not hard for musicians to make a living. But it's difficult for us to, to make a living at the same time to find a meaningful way to let people think you're a successful musician. I don't know if I'm delivering that message correctly.

**HP:** I get it.

**AL:** But you can, you can, you know, rewrite it a little bit.

**HP:** Um, this is a weird question, but what do you think the world would look like without music?

**AL:** Do you like silent films?

**HP:** No. I don't really watch them.

**AL:** Oh okay, well, or if you—you just imagine watching a movie, or a TV show, and there's no music background. There's no background music. It's, it's pretty boring. It's pretty dull. You just heard people talking, speaking, shouting, and just loud noises. And I think a successful film. I'm nothing about some films, but most films, the film music, music, you know, takes a big part in that film. And I think in our life, um, we probably don't realize, but there—there are a lot of music around us. Not when you're in classes, of course, not when you're working. But when—when you're in a coffee shop, when you're driving, when you're at a shopping mall. There's always music. And I think we just forget how important it is until we lose it. And so I—it's hard to imagine a world without music. And I don't think that will happen. And yeah.

**HP:** What are your thoughts on traditional Chinese music and Chinese opera? How do you feel about it?

**AL:** Chinese opera it's a hard question for me to answer because I don't know much about it. But Chinese music, well, it's, it's a culture. It's a culture where it's, uh, well I guess, I'm very bad with history. But um most Chinese music that we heard, we always we always think Chinese histories, you know, 5000 years or longer. And we think all the music we heard has a long history. But to be honest, like most, um, Chinese music that we, you recognize, or people perform are probably from the last hundred to 200 years because through different emperor, you know, there's 焚书坑儒 right? A lot of art, music are lost or back when people pass down the music not from, um, notating them, but from, um, word of mouth. From—from your parents, from your ancestors. And so, compared to, uh, Western classical music, Chinese music actually doesn't have a longer history, at least from what's out there that people can recognize familiar—familiar with. Um, so your question was, how...

**HP:** Like what are your thoughts about traditional Chinese music versus classical?

**AL:** I think it's—well, first of all, I think it's, it's very beautiful. I wouldn't compare Chinese music with classical music. If I had to compare Chinese music, it's more like, like, uh, folk music. It's not something that you listen to, you know, it's not like Beethoven, Mozart, but more like country music. Because it's more to your uh daily life. And of course, it's Chinese music is—the term is very broad. Um, so it has a lot of beautiful, um, human culture and the history of—of this history. And it's—it's hard for me to say how I think about it. But if I had a choice, I feel like more people should know about the Chinese melodies, because it's actually everywhere. And—and a lot of composers, Western composers actually took all the melodies, the Chinese melodies, into the compositions. And I think it's because they—they find the beauty in those melodies.

**HP:** Not only for like, classical pieces where a composer—Western composers take like traditional Chinese music elements. I guess in recent years, America has seen like a lot of Chinese artists join into like pop music. So how do you think, I guess, the dynamic of the blending between the two cultural musics have changed throughout the years? Especially living in New York which is like such a large Chinese population?

**AL:** Well, I think the United States is, it's because there are just so many immigrants here. So it—it has become—everything's possible here I would say, compared to, uh, Germany, or—France. It's harder for you to imagine there is a Chinese orchestra there. But in the States, there are actually quite many Chinese orchestras out there and Chinese groups. Um, the blending wise, always wanting what my musical society is doing, but at the same time, because the—the different cultures that United States have, has, have, has um, if you want people to the general audience to, to uh accept what you do.

Now, the blending becomes important. And like I said, people will, especially the young, the younger generation, they want to get information in a very short time. And also, um they find different cultures a lot more cool than their—their own cultures. So, I guess right now it's not about blending. The blending is just a way to to create new stuff, new—new or new culture. But um it's still if you don't understand where that original, um, original melody or original tune is from, then it's hard for you to understand why the blending is important. Does that make sense?

**HP:** Yeah.

**AL:** Yeah.

**HP:** So where do you see the future of like, this blending?

**AL:** The future of blending? Um...

**HP:** Do you think it'll become like, more I don't know, like a more normalized kind of genre?

**AL:** It will definitely become a genre for sure. Just because, uh, like we were talking about Western composer composes compose pieces for a combination of Western and Eastern or even European, or, you know, from Mid East Middle East uh. Just all the or through the Silk Roads, or different instruments combined together will create a new—new voice and in the beginning, people will find it very interesting or very new.

But of course after a while, people expect something like that to have happen when they go to a concert. And, um, and also in many orchestras they have a series of concerts about, you know, music from China, music from—from—from somewhere. And that becomes what people, what people will look forward to. Not just um, you know, something they just listen to every day. But, um, yeah, I'm sure it's gonna become something that's very well something that people will expect to—to have when they go to a concert.

**HP:** Um why don't you think this like blending between Eastern music and Western music works in like Germany or France or like those countries as you said?

**AL:** Well Germany and France, they have—the culturally, they have a—a higher pride in, in their own culture. And, for example, it's very difficult for a foreigner to—to make a living to become, to succeed in those two countries. And unlike here, you see so many Asians in lots of concerts, you see, not just Asians that you see, uh, just diff-different race of people in the States. But in not just Germany and France, I was actually mostly talking about Europe in general. It's hard for you to go to school there and stay there. At least it's compared to here it's almost maybe 1-200 (?).

**HP:** Yeah. Um moving on to like your identity. How do you identify? Because I guess you moved from Taiwan at such a young age do you think of yourself as like Taiwanese, Taiwanese-American? Yeah.

**AL:** Um well, I—if you ask where I'm from, well, first I will say I'm from Taiwan, and I—I'm a New Yorker. Um I wouldn't say I'm Taiwanese-American, because I know my—my personality and my lifestyle, it's, it's still very Asian. And right now I take it back. Um my, my thinking is not very Asian, but um but I love Asian food, and I love Asian food more than, more than burgers or pizza. And my circle of friends are—there are a lot of Taiwanese a lot of Asians. Um, but culturally I respect and I also think, um, from both Western and Eastern, I'm probably a little more combined. Um, and I see myself in the States probably for my entire life. But even so, I still wouldn't think I'm like American, American. Taiwan will always be my home. And yeah.

**HP:** How was your first transition when you moved to America? Was it difficult?

**AL:** Hmm, I'm trying to remember, that's quite a long time ago. Well, I guess because when I came, first came, my sister is already here. And so it's a small school, is a boarding school. So she's there to look after me. And my classmates and people who are—almost everyone there we come from, we have the same background from Asia, from Europe. And we spoke no English. So we're studying English all

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together.

And so that was actually pretty, it wasn't difficult. It was pretty easy. And I guess I don't really get homesick. I remember I used to call my mom every other day. When I first—well, it wasn't that easy, back then it wasn't that easy to make phone calls to, to a foreign country. But, uh, but after a while, you get used to it. I don't really get homesick in general and the I—I adapt quite easily. It was a good—good transition even going from California to New York. I, you know, I make friends easily so.

**HP:** Have your friend circles always been like mostly Asians or, was there ever like 50/50?

**AL:** Um, well, I guess because my lifestyle is very Asian. I like to go eat hot pot. I like to go sing karaoke, and those are all in Chinese. And so, also because the community that I'm involved in are mostly Taiwanese or Chinese communities. So that circle is always Chinese speaking. Um, even when I go to Chinatown to play for the seniors, the elders, they are all, you know, Chinese speaking people. And but my work, um, are mostly with non-Asians I—I guess.

**HP:** Do you think your like musical experi—musical like career experience has influenced your identity or impacted your identity?

**AL:** What what do you mean?

**HP:** Like, I guess like with the chamber society with like Amphion, or Amphion? Amphion? [**AL:** Amphion.] And like, um I guess like work wise how you focus how you work with like non-Asians and then your friends are mostly Asian. How do you know how that...

**AL:** That identity is where I'm coming from or?

**HP:** Like, just like how you identify as like, or how you feel like you're 50/50 or like a mixture of both cultures?

**AL:** Well I guess the funny thing is funny thing is because I know Asian is still the minority in the States. But at the same time, the classical world Asian is no longer the minority. If you see all the major competitions, you know just so many Asians. But I still like to promote Asian artists, performers and Asian composers. Um, but at the same time, what I'm promoting is Western classical music. So that, so it's hard for me to say what my identity is, right? Since I'm promoting an Asian um—Western culture to an Asian culture. So um, I probably never thought about what the identity is. I guess also living in New York, it's just very blending thing.

**HP:** So you mentioned you like food a lot. What are your favorite like specific foods?

**AL:** Specific foods? Um, well I love steak, it's where I'm going tonight. And um I love sushi. Well I, I guess if you ask if I can only pick one kind of food to eat for my entire life it will be steak and sushi. But like in Asian food I enjoy eating. I'm not big, um, like, like Italian like pasta, or pizza, carb. I'm not big carb person. I like meat.

**HP:** That's good. Um, what are your personal goals or plans for the future?

**AL:** Well one of my, uh, dream, I guess, it's to create two start international art schools in Taiwan. A university or a college or conservatory, depends how you say and because well, Taiwan is my hometown

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and I feel we lack of, um, international visibility. And having an international–international college in Taiwan will help with people to recognize talent a lot more, especially, um, with art. Because um, Taiwan is a very small island. I'm pretty sure I'm using the right word.

And a lot of people in Taiwan, they, it's—let's talk about just musicians. They don't know how big the world is or they don't know where they stand as a, as a musician. And if they leave Taiwan—because I know a lot of my–my friends in the past, they always thought they're you know, they're the best in their school, the best in Taiwan. But when they came to the States they realized they're really like nobody. And—and when you have that um mentality, mindset in Taiwan thinking you are the best, then you don't improve. And—and you—you won't see there is more possibility in art or in classical music in Taiwan.

So having an international school in Taiwan will actually help people to see a lot more, especially most the, uh, faculties I will invite to teach at a school will be from the States or from Europe. So not not from Taiwan locally. And then I think, also having an international-international school there, the city or area will become more international too. It'll be more—the students, their parents, their friends will come to Taiwan to visit and they will know the Taiwan culture, the food, the people a lot more. So that's one thing I want you to do in—hopefully in the next five years.

**HP:** What do you think is your greatest accomplishment so far in life?

**AL:** So far in life? Do I have any? Um, I guess one thing I'm proud of is, um well, two things, I guess. One is, um, in my musical career, um, one is I'm probably–probably the only, if not the very few, um performer, proficient performer that–that can do both or two instruments that's Western, Eastern. I actually don't know anyone else who does, both professionally. And that's one thing I'm actually very proud of.

Um, of course, my music society. It's—we are in our fifth or ninth season, but um, seriously, it's if we run it like a business, it's just our fourth season, and that's doing well. But the other part is just being a person, you know, in living in New York or I feel like I'm at least doing a lot of community service. And people recognize that a lot. So when people come to New York, when they need help, they know if they come to me, I can always help them to find some answers. And I like being–being able to help people.

**HP:** Um do you have any advice for like future Asian-American um musicians?

**AL:** Musicians? Well, people say, Asian musicians, we are the new Jews. You know how, you know, um the past century the famous accomplished musicians are mostly Jewish, and nowadays are mostly Asians. And so there isn't much I can tell the next generation because I think they are gonna do great. Because like I said, they are no longer the minorities. And they are—they have people like Yo Yo Ma, Cho-Liang Lin and many accomplished uh Lang Lang, Yu Xiaolong (?) that's out there to lead to–to tell them Asian can make it up, you know, can make it to the top.

And I guess it's just about—the hardest thing would be with parents. Because Asian American parents and parents in Asia and parents in the states who are not Asian, are all very different, and it really depends on the communication with your parents. And yeah, I–I think it's the education and your family's it's more important, and I think that's not why I can give suggestions.

**HP:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

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**AL:** To add? Delete everything I just said. [all laugh] Um...

**HP:** Anything about like your life? Or inspirations?

**AL:** No, I guess personality wise I really like people. I always, well, my well I'm my mom was te—ask me or or, uh, **beg me not to be so busy. But I really enjoy a busy life and she always worries about me will you know 过劳死. Like so you know, die from being so busy, working too hard, but I always, I always tell her I actually love what I do. Not just with music but with life, with people, with the community, and when you enjoy something so much, you actually won't be 过劳死, 过劳死 is only when you're doing something you don't enjoy.**

And also I love helping people being I always feel, I help someone to become a better person in, I don't know, as a musician, as a—in every every possible way. At the end, that person will come back to me and will help me if I need help too. So I—I always feel the more I give, you know, give out, the more I'll you know get back. And that's why I like making friends. And I think that's important for everyone.

**HP:** Well, thank you very much for your time. Yeah, this was really cool. Um...

**AL:** I hope it's not too difficult to—to, I'm not very good at expressing myself logically.

**HP:** Me neither.