

Without music, the world would become quite a dull place. What people don't seem to realize though is the amount of dedication musicians have for playing their instruments; without this dedication, music would have vanished a long time ago or it would sound very different compared to current music. Mary-Catherine, a senior at Camden Central High School, has been playing a variety of instruments for almost thirteen years. Not only is she extremely devoted to her musical career, but she is also an exceedingly good musician as well.

"The whole reason I started playing music was because I went to church every Sunday, and there was a piano player. I never realized how much I loved music until I was around five. That's when I started to really be influenced; it just mainly started with the piano player at church," says Mary-Catherine Stewart, who is currently seventeen. "The first instrument I played was the piano. I started playing it when I was five. I would listen to songs they would play every Sunday and then I would come home and try to play at least a little bit of what they did. I would learn the rest from there" "Being a five year old, it was kind of hard, especially with my attention span, but after I got it down, it was pretty easy."

Even though Mary-Catherine has been playing the piano for about twelve years, her music abilities don't stop there. "Besides the piano, I've played the guitar, the violin, the harp, the harmonica, the djembe, the didgeridoo -kind of-, the marimba, the synthesizer, and a few others," she says. Not only does she play a variety of instruments, but she practices the variety of instruments constantly. "I practice and play almost every day. I really don't like to say practice, I just like to call it playing because the more I play; the better I feel that I am. I definitely do not think that I'd be where I am today as far as my level of skills goes if it wasn't for practicing." Out of all of the instruments she can play though, Mary-Catherine still prefers the piano over anything. "I guess the piano is my favorite just because that's what I started out with and I feel like I can sometimes express myself in more ways when I play the piano."

Mary-Catherine is also thought of highly by others for her musical skills. "I think Mary-Catherine is very good. I think she really started to shine when she played the piano for the band, or when she plays the synthesizer," says Mr. James Young, the Camden High School band director, who has known Mary-Catherine for almost four years. Katie Ferreira, who has known Mary-Catherine since their elementary days and is on the high school band with her, also agrees.

“She plays really well. She can play a variety of instruments, all of them really well. She is also really good at reading the music too.”

Not only does Mary-Catherine love playing for the high school marching band, but she loves performing for the public in general. “I love playing for the public because I like to see the expressions on their faces and how surprised they are sometimes when I play. Especially at the piano recitals, if you play something really crazy and interesting, it’s good to hear them clap and cheer for you afterwards. It’s the same with band; when you pull off a great show, everybody loves you.” Mary-Catherine has also received several awards for being a talented player. “A couple of years ago, I went to honor band and made it into one of the best bands in Tennessee. I got to play with them and we put on a whole concert in three days. I have also received a Marching Maneuver award, meaning that I was the overall best marcher at that time period. I’ve also have received a few others I can’t recall.” However, Mary-Catherine had just a little bit of stage fright when she first began performing. “At first I did get nervous, but I’ve learned to deal with that in my own ways. If I ever made a mistake, I would just keep playing and act as if nothing ever happened.” Mary-Catherine also shared a band memory. “I was in eighth grade; I was going to one of my sets. We only had a few seconds to get there or else we had to run laps, and I made it to our set, but our tuba player at the time was also running to his set. He didn’t even look up while he was running and I was right there in front of him. I screamed; we tried to dodge each other, but we dodged in the same directions; we finally collided and fell.”

Mr. Young and Katie also shared some of their favorite musical memories involving Mary-Catherine. “I think my favorite musical memory moment with Mary-Catherine was when we played together for the play, Romeo and Juliet, a few years ago for Mrs. Tucker. I had a really good time and that was probably my fondest moment,” Mr. Young recalls. Katie says, “I remember at band camp last year, we had a warm-up called ‘Sweet Child M.C.’ It was actually ‘Sweet Child of Mine’ on the piano, it was really cool. Mary-Catherine came up with it.”

Nevertheless, Mary-Catherine doesn’t stop there; she plans on going to school for music because she loves playing it so much. “I plan on going to school for music therapy, piano pedagogy, which is a fancy term for being a piano instructor, and conducting,” she says. Mr. Young and Katie both agree they could definitely see Mary-Catherine pursuing a college degree in the music field. “I think she would be very good at it. I know she’s still kind of undecided on

what she wants to do, but I think some form of a music background would be really, really good,” states Mr. Young. “Yes, it would be good, that’s what she’s planning on going to school for,” says Katie.

Mary-Catherine finished with excellent advice for novice musicians. “The main thing for beginners would be that you have got to understand before you start playing that you aren’t going to sound like a professional the first time you play. You are going to have to work a lot and it takes a lot of dedication. You have to practice, practice, practice, so you can get where you want to be or else you’ll be disappointed.”

Musicians must have a lot of patience and willingness to practice to become fine players. It can take years to become one, but the results are definitely rewarding. Mary-Catherine has proven that with years of long hours of practice and dedication, it is possible to achieve a high-level of skills, but she is most certainly not going to stop there.