



LOCAL TEEN MUSICIANS TO MAKE CARNEGIE HALL DEBUT

By Beth Wood
FOR THE UNION-TRIBUNE

How do you get to Carnegie Hall, New York's most famous concert venue? For two 16-year-old San Diegans, percussionist Yoyo Wu and clarinetist Jun Kim, the answer is talent, hard work and a serious love of music.

They were among the hundreds of teenagers who applied and auditioned for this year's National Youth Orchestra 2, Carnegie's summer program for aspiring classical or jazz musicians. The 89-member ensemble will include musicians from 30 states and Guam. Its two-week training concludes with a performance at Carnegie's storied Stern Hall on July 27.

The group will then perform at Scotland's Edinburgh International Festival in early August.

Both Yoyo and Jun applied unsuccessfully for the orchestra program in 2024, which heightened their enthusiasm about being accepted into the highly competitive program this year. The students pay for their travel, but all other costs are taken care of.

"I am excited to work with the faculty at NYO2," said Jun, who — like Yoyo — lives in Carmel Valley. "And

Percussionist Yoyo Wu and clarinetist Jun Kim also set to perform in Scotland with San Diego Symphony Music Director Rafael Payare



our conductor will be Rafael Payare, the music director of San Diego Symphony. I go to their concerts a lot, so it's very inspiring to be able to play with him conducting us."

"I agree with what Jun

said about the amazing conductors and coaches," said Yoyo, who plays piano as well as percussion. "I also hope to make friends at NYO2 and meet people from all across the U.S."

NYO2 is just one of many

summer events for both these Canyon Crest Academy students. Yoyo — after wrapping up several weeks attending competitions and piano recitals — will participate in Oklahoma's Great Plains International

Marimba Competition. She will then fly to New York.

Jun's summer started at Point Loma Nazarene University's San Diego Summer Music Institute, which he has attended four times. Then he's off

to Boston University's Tanglewood Institute for a two-week clarinet intensive. After making a short stop back in San Diego, Jun heads for the Big Apple to join NYO2.

Jun and Yoyo have known each other since fourth grade. Shortly after returning here from NYO2, they will be helping coordinate the Carmel Valley Symphony. The two are part of the leadership team at this free, student-run, two-week music intensive.

POWERFUL MEMORIES

Payare can hardly count the ways Jun and Yoyo will benefit from their time at the National Youth Orchestra 2.

"First of all, they will make bonds that are going to stay for life," said Payare, speaking from his San Diego home. "Maybe they will keep on the path and pursue a career in classical music, or maybe they will do something different. Either way, it's an experience they will never forget."

Payare will conduct NYO2 at Carnegie Hall and then at the Edinburgh festival. His wife, acclaimed cellist Alisa Weilerstein, will be featured as a soloist in both concerts.

He emphasized that

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HOW ALISON KRAUSS FOUND THE SONG THAT REKINDLED HER BAND

The singer-fiddler and Union Station will perform at the Rady Shell Saturday

By Jon Pareles
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alison Krauss never stops searching for songs. But she only records them when she's ready. "She does it 24/7/365," said Barry Bales, bassist in her band Union Station since 1990. "She's on the lookout for songs, and she's a song hoarder. She'll hear a song she likes, and it may never see the light of day for 15, 20 years. But she'll remember it."

A decade after Krauss' last tour with Union Station, and 14 years after the band's previous studio album, the singer and fiddler reconvened the group for "Arcadia," a new album released March 28. They're now touring in support of the record, with a concert Saturday at the Rady Shell in San Diego.

"I've been gathering tunes for this since the last time we recorded," Krauss said in a video interview from the Doghouse, a Nashville, Tenn., studio where she has recorded for decades. "I'm just waiting for the first song to show up, until 'Ah, here it is — it's time to record.' It's always been that way."

That first song was Jeremy Lister's "Looks Like the End of the Road," a bitterly mournful waltz about disillusionment and despair: "The lines that were drawn a long time ago / Are buried and gone in lies and ego," she sings. It sets the dark tone for "Arcadia," an album of 10 tracks, all but two of them in minor keys, with lyrics full of bleak tidings. At the end, the album offers a glimpse of redemption in another Lister song: "There's a Light Up Ahead."

When Krauss heard "Looks Like the End of the Road," during the peak of the COVID pandemic, her intuition told her it was the starting point of that long-awaited album. "It just has to be the right timing, for things to be the most truthful representation," she said. "Had I not found that song when I did, who knows when we would have gone in?"

"Arcadia" reconvenes and reconfigures a band that has transformed the sound of modern bluegrass by constantly drawing new subtleties from old-time roots.

Union Station can easily muster the quick-fingered virtuosity required for upbeat, foot-stomping bluegrass tunes that punctuate its albums and live sets.

But what makes the band so distinctive is its quietly incandescent restraint: the hushed concentration it summons behind Krauss' pristinely melancholy soprano, which can sound haunted even when she sings about true love.

Union Station released its



After 14 years between albums, singer and fiddler Alison Krauss has regrouped Union Station to sing about darkness and light. The group — Ron Block, left, Jerry Douglas, Krauss, Russell Moore and Barry Bales — is carrying on without a key member, Dan Tyminski. **ALLISTER ANN / NYT**

debut album in 1989, and even as its audience grew, its music sought more subtlety and intimacy.

With each album, Krauss and her musicians have further stripped away showy technical displays and ornamental flourishes, rigorously distilling their arrangements to focus on the song rather than the performers. "I want to be a servant to the story," Krauss said.

"If somebody presses play on my banjo solo on a song, I don't want them to go, 'Oh, that's a lot of notes,'" said Ron Block, a Union Station member since 1991. "I want them to recognize the song. It's not about amazing people as much as it is about moving people."

Jerry Douglas, the dobro player who joined Union Station in 1998, said, "This band listens to one another more than any band I've ever been in."

"We all discovered what a powerful vehicle it is to have her singing these songs, and to calm the flurries of notes down a little bit," he added. "It's there and it's hiding, bubbling underneath, ready to come out and gobble up everything at any point. But another thing about it is knowing that you can do that — but not doing it."

Douglas — whose dobro and steel guitar often answer Krauss' voice with keening, sighing alternate melodies — has long been a first-call Nashville studio musician, bandleader, collaborator and producer. Among his recent projects are "The Set," his 2024 album as a leader; recording with Celtic musicians in Scotland for the Transatlantic Sessions series; and producing an upcoming album for

the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. The other Union Station members also stayed active between albums. Krauss released "Windy City," a more mainstream country album, in 2017, and in 2021 she and Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant released their second duet album, "Raise the Roof," followed by a tour. (Their first album, "Raising Sand," won the Grammy for album of the year in 2009.) Bales and Block toured with Krauss for "Windy City," played studio sessions, wrote songs and released instructional videos.

"Everybody's always gone and done their own thing and had a very busy career outside of this band," Krauss said. "When we come back together, we've lived all these other places, and it just makes it stronger. I've always felt like, you know, life sounds good on people."

"Arcadia" marks a major lineup change in Union Station. For three decades, Dan Tyminski traded off lead vocals with Krauss, providing a grainy, rough-hewed contrast to the delicacy of her voice. He won Grammy Awards with Union Station and on his own, notably for "Man of Constant Sorrow" from the 2000 Coen Brothers movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"

During the sessions for "Arcadia," Tyminski decided he wanted to continue his solo career instead of joining Union Station on tour this year. "Nobody wanted Dan to go," Douglas said. "But Dan's got a thing he's got to go do, and we all respect that."

Although Tyminski worked on instrumental sessions for the album, the male lead vocals are sung by Russell Moore, who has led one of the top groups on the

ALISON KRAUSS & UNION STATION FEATURING JERRY DOUGLAS
When: 7 p.m. Saturday
Where: The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, 222 Marina Park Way, downtown
Tickets: \$75.65 - \$136.75
Online: theshell.org

bluegrass circuit, IIIrd Tyme Out, for three decades. "He and Dan are the best of that generation of that high, beautiful bluegrass singing," Krauss said. "His pitch — he's just a laser beam."

Moore will tour with Union Station this year, putting IIIrd Tyme Out on hold. "I had no desire to give up my own band," Moore said. "She assured me that's not what she was asking for."

Musically, Moore said, Union Station "is a totally different world to live in."

"I'm a pretty full-throated type singer," he continued. "Now I'm having to learn how to sing from a different place. On the songs that I'm singing lead on, I have the opportunity to go to my normal place and belt it out like I have been for years. But on the harmony stuff, what part of my voice do I put my vocal at to match and complement what Alison is doing?"

The songs on "Arcadia" encompass both personal and historical tribulations. With a smile, Krauss described them as tales about "the good old days when times were bad."

Some of the songs draw on old public-domain ballads. "Richmond on the James" recounts the last words of a dying Civil

War soldier, and "Granite Mills" vividly describes a fatal 1874 fire in a textile mill.

"I love a true story," Krauss said. "I don't know how many of our favorite love songs were based on truth. And if it wasn't that story itself that was true, the feeling was. Everyone has these emotions. It's just that the circumstances change."

In 2010, Krauss said, she discovered "The Hangman," a 1951 poem by Maurice Ogden that's a parable about the coming of fascism.

She asked her brother, bassist Viktor Krauss, to write a melody for it, and Moore sings its ominous opening verses.

Discreetly but pervasively, Viktor Krauss also shaped the sound of the entire album, orchestrating it with sustained string arrangements overdubbed by his sister. The album opens with an eerie, tremulous, cinematic string ensemble. "I wanted to have a new sound as the first thing we heard," Alison Krauss said.

Other songs on the album — from Robert Lee Castleman, one of Krauss' longtime songwriting sources — are about heart-break, regrets and life lessons: "The Wrong Way" and "Forever," which laments, "I can't hold on and I can't let go."

For Krauss, Union Station's songs are "survival stories," she said. "Someone survived to tell them. So for me, these sad songs are very encouraging. They've told someone's story and that's how we are going to remember them forever."

"Whatever that the situation was, it's over. And you've gotten through it."

MUSICIANS

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there won't be any coddling of these teenage musicians.

"When we do these concerts, we don't see age," Payare said. "We are not going to do a different version because they're younger. They and their peers will try to achieve high artistic goals and do it in an amazing environment."

The National Youth Orchestra has three groups, NYO-USA and NYO Jazz for ages 16-19, and NYO2 for ages 14-16. All three ensembles participate in intensive two-week training residencies at Purchase College, State University of New York (SUNY).

According to Douglas Beck, Director of Artist Training Programs at Carnegie Hall, the training includes sectional rehearsals, master classes and private lessons, as well as playing with the jazz ensemble and attending NYO's annual "Well-Being" concert.

The faculty is brimming with principal players from leading orchestras from across the U.S.

Yoyo and Jun have been looking forward to working with all the teachers, especially the experts on their instruments.

"The NYO2 percussion teacher is Matthew Howard from the Los Angeles Philharmonic," Yoyo enthused. "The timpani coach, Don Liuzzi, is from the Philadelphia Orchestra, which is kind of crazy, because they're so good."

"The clarinet coach, Jonathan Gunn, teaches at UT Austin now," Jun said. "He was former principal clarinet at Cincinnati Symphony. I'm excited to work with him."

Carnegie's Beck said the faculty is eager to teach at NYO trainings.

"They enjoy the experience almost as much as the young people," said Beck, speaking from his New York office.

"I think it reminds them of that time in their careers when they were encountering this great music for the first time and falling in love with playing their instruments in a good orchestra. Those are very powerful memories."

It's not easy being accepted into NYO2. Interested students upload their recordings to a digital audition and application platform and provide basic biographical material and information about their music-performance history and letters of recommendation. They must also submit a video essay.

JUN KIM



Jun Kim and Yoyo Wu are students at Canyon Crest Academy. Both Carmel Valley residents will be juniors this fall. In addition

to English, Jun speaks Korean. Shanghai-born Yoyo speaks Mandarin and a dialect from her native city.

Jun's parents, Wonho Kim and

Insuk Yun, weren't particularly musical, he said.

"But they believe in learning music, even if you're not going to go into music," said Jun, who started piano at 7 and clarinet at 10.

"They've always supported me, like driving me around for lessons, rehearsals and stuff. They knew that music should be part of your early education."

Jun has played here in the well-regarded Mainly Mozart Youth Orchestra for almost five years.

He was principal clarinet in the 2025 California All State High School Symphony Orchestra and won first place in the 2024 Mainly Mozart Youth Orchestra Solo Competition, Wind and Brass.

For the past two years, Jun has been under the tutelage of Irvine-based clarinetist Sam Boutris, whose debut album was released last year.

"Right away, you could tell Jun gets along well with his clarinet," said Boutris, speaking from New York's Lake George Music Festival where he was performing. "I found Jun to be intelligent, articulate, polite and most important disciplined."

"On Instagram, there's a tight-knit community that gets into clarinet jokes and memes. Kids are practicing and posting. Jun is so good that he has a lot of followers. He's accepted being a role model with a lot of grace and maturity."

"And he's teaching me some Gen Z slang"

YOYO WU



Just as Jun requires a ride to Irvine for lessons at least once a week, Yoyo also needs to get places. Her mother, Emily Wei, is the chauffeur, but has an additional, very heavy-duty role.

"I have a lot of lessons for all my instruments, rehearsals and sometimes concerts and competitions," marimbist, percussionist and pianist Yoyo said. "My mom's busy as well, but she always makes time for me."

"A lot of the venues I go to perform or compete don't have a marimba, so we take mine. It's like 200 to 300 pounds, maybe more. My mom always helps me take it apart, carry it, get it into the car, and then take it out and put it back together. It's like we're playing (the video game) Tetris!"

Yoyo has been a member of the 70-year-old San Diego Youth Symphony since 2021. Among her accolades, she received the 2025 San Diego Musical Merit Foundation Scholarship and was the youngest person to win La Jolla Symphony's Emerging Artists Competition. On piano, Yoyo has placed in three major competitions in 2025 alone. She studies with Andy Watkins, San Diego Symphony percussionist and assistant principal timpanist and Point Loma Nazarene University percussion instructor. He noted

that Yoyo's piano prowess has enhanced her percussion work.

"She thinks about musicality and interpretation," Watkins said. "She puts personality into it. That's a mature skill most people her age aren't thinking about. Working with Yoyo is fun."

"She's put a lot of effort into marimba and is an accomplished pianist. Yoyo picks up on things very quickly. If there's a trick I can show her, next time I can tell she's worked on it and incorporated it. She'll be one of the most talented kids at NYO2."

For Venezuelan-born conductor Payare — who attended the public music education program, El Sistema, in his native country — working with NYO2 comes naturally.

"That was the way I was brought up," Payare said. "I think everybody should have that chance. If I can share that with as many people as possible, I'm more than happy to do it."

In turn, Yoyo and Jun are happy Payare and NYO2 are offering ways for them and other students to enrich their musical endeavors.

"I think music helps connect people," Jun said. "I've gotten to know a lot of people in my community and other places. When we play music together, it creates cool new opportunities."

"Playing music together creates and strengthens friendships," Yoyo agreed. "I've been to some programs like NYO2 where I met a bunch of people, and a lot of them are friends to this day."