

# Student Exchange @ CUHK

## Student Sharing

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Major in Music

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### Ensemble experiences

During this exchange semester, I joined the School's Saxophone Quartet, Jazz Ensemble, and Symphonic Band. We had twelve performances this semester, and I am not exaggerating. Although I am the youngest in the saxophone quartet, in which others are masters and doctoral students, I did not feel like I was treated any differently. When it comes to making compromises and agreements during rehearsals, I appreciate the culture in that everyone's idea is accepted equally. Not only did we perform successfully, but we also built amazing chemistry and became good friends.

In Jazz Ensemble, although I regard myself as the least experienced, I am also very grateful to get the chance to play with such an amazing team. Instead of teasing other less-experienced players, the learning culture here is encouraging. During rehearsals, the conductor always tells us that 'there is no right or wrong, but there is always a better choice'. By trying to do more solos, we learned how to avoid playing notes that are relatively unstable in the chord theory, and we aim for those stable ones who could give goosebumps. At the last concert, I had the chance to play an improvised solo in a tune called 'Total Jazz' by Billy Strayhorn. I felt so amazed since the crowd was going crazy after my solo. Memories are lovely.

In symphonic bands, I do not know if it is due to the US military cultural background, but members of the US wind bands are so disciplined. In Hong Kong, it is very common to be late and unprepared for a rehearsal. At least I have joined nearly ten wind bands in Hong Kong, and a vast majority of them do not care about discipline. Yet, it is completely unacceptable in the US. To me, this is a big cultural shock. Also, people here treat rehearsals very seriously, and they will have a specific rehearsal schedule every time, which is another new culture to me. Therefore, I am also thinking if I could bring these beautiful wind band traditions back to Hong Kong. If we could learn from this culture, I believe rehearsals would be much more effective in Hong Kong.

### Saxophone events

As a saxophone performance major, I have embraced many saxophone events in this exchange. Early in February, our saxophone studio requires all the students to participate in the 'Recording Project'. It is a project to help students build up their music CVs. Students could use the recorded video for any purpose, such as applying for a master's or doctoral degree audition, applying for competitions, uploading it to a personal website, and so on. I released it on my YouTube channel and applied to three international competitions. I am very grateful that I got a 'Grand Slam', meaning that I was selected by the jury panel as the champion in all the competitions I applied to, it was such an honor to me, and I have learned so much during the project.

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Then in February, I was lucky to meet a doctoral student at our school, who is an endorsing artist of 'Breathtaking', a famous Japanese saxophone neck strap brand. During our meeting, he taught me how to utilize the neck strap to fit my playing posture better. I realized that I was using the neck strap wrongly all the time!

During these months, I also went to two professional saxophone quartet concerts: 'Nois Saxophone Quartet' and 'Red Clay Saxophone Quartet'. They might be the best ones I have ever listened to. As a co-founder of a saxophone quartet in Hong Kong, the performances are truly impressive and motivational to me.

Moving on to April, I got a chance to participate in an inspiring masterclass by Dr. Susan Fancher, the professor of saxophone at Duke University. I was taught how to perform less aggressively and more lyrically in difficult running passages. The masterclass helps me achieve a better shape before my upcoming performances.

Finally, I must share that I have organized my first ever official solo recital on the 24th of April. To me, this is a life-changing experience. I have never dreamt of myself having such an opportunity. I managed to invite most of my friends, and 40 of them came to support me in person, and many of my friends from Hong Kong and the UK supported me through the Livestream! As I did not expect to do a solo recital at the very beginning, I did not have any preparation for that. Right until late March, my saxophone professor Dr. Steven Stusek suggested this idea, and I was very enthusiastic to organize the event. Hence, I only had one month to put everything together: Practicing more than three hours a day, scheduling rehearsals with my pianist and quartet, portrait photo-shooting, poster designing, videography, stage setting, and Livestream arrangements, to name but just a few, are things that I must arrange during a single month. Though it is exhausting, it is no doubt my biggest and most rewarding event in this exchange. All these further prompted me to apply for my saxophone master's degree in the US, as I enjoyed the learning atmosphere and I could foresee how much I would improve if I get the chance to study longer.

## Religious Journey

As I am a Christian, I also spent a lot of time exploring different churches during my exchange. I visited a total of five churches: College Park Baptist Church, College Place United Methodist Church, Definition Church, Korean United Methodist Church, and First Baptist Church. All of them have completely different worshipping styles and approaches, it is mind-blowing to visit. I also made very good friends at the Definition Church, and we even had a fellowship group where we gathered every week to share our faith.

## Traveling around the States

During my exchange, not only did I stay in North Carolina, but I also traveled to different states. I traveled to Washington during spring break, Boston, and New York after I completed my semester, and unfortunately, New Jersey is a temporary place to stay as I am currently stuck in the US.

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These places that I visited are full of art cultures. As a Bachelor of Arts major, visiting the museums and galleries is highlighted during the trip. It was my first time to closely appreciate those huge dinosaur fossils and masterpieces by Vincent Van Gogh and Pablo Picasso. I also visited the top universities such as Harvard and MIT, and top music schools such as Julliard, Berklee, New England Conservatory, Boston Conservatory, and so on. Besides, I got a chance to watch two Broadway shows (Lion King in NYC and Rent in Greensboro) and some amazing concerts such as Justin Bieber's Tour in Greensboro and Cleveland Symphony Orchestra, a world-class orchestra in Carnegie Hall NYC. These events are simply eye-opening, they gave me a lot of insights to become a better artist.