



## Becker Family Foundation Quarterly Newsletter

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### **Bringing Music and Expression to Students in Unprecedented Times**



Since the beginning of 2019, The Becker Family Foundation and Play it Forward string ensemble have been providing talented children of all backgrounds with the opportunity to learn and experience playing on fine string instruments. However, 2020 has brought new and unprecedented challenges to not only this foundation, but to the world at large. When it became clear that COVID-19 was going to become an international issue, The Becker Family Foundation knew changes would have to be made. They also knew that shutting down the organization would be a tragic loss to the students' progress and to the community they had formed.

“Musicians use music as an outlet for expression,” said Marilyn Becker. “Losing the chance to play, to learn to use this medium as an emotional outlet, would be devastating to these kids who, now more than ever, need that outlet!” With this in mind, the directors of the program, Andrew Lynn and Ying Lau quickly set up YouTube lessons. The following week, they used an online platform to allow children to attend

Andrew Lynn, Conductor and Play it Forward  
Sting Ensemble

lessons remotely. The first meeting was a smashing success with students finding it a chance to not only receive instruction, but also socialize with other students that they had not seen for weeks. "It was total chaos, but joyous," Marilyn says. "The kids were elated to see one another and to put their bows back to their strings!"

In times like these where "normalcy" and "routine" are being abandoned for the safety of ourselves and others, The Becker Family Foundation is gifting the young students in their program with something invaluable; a chance for expression, stimulation, and socialization. These online lessons will continue to be free of cost, as lessons have been from the beginning. The founders are very aware of the power of music to free not only the mind, but also the soul, and with isolation being the name of the game in the Midlands - and the world over - it is more important than ever to feel connected.

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## Our Year So Far

### Winter Concert

January 9, 2020

On January 9th of this year, The Becker Family Foundation and Play it Forward String Ensemble joined with The Newberry College Department of Music School Performance and professional musician Sonia Lee to bring a violin performance to Newberry S.C. This incredible showing of musical talent was a Dufford Institute for Cultural Diversity Event in conjunction with Newberry Arts For All (NAFA), The Becker Family Foundation & Newberry College Department of Music School Performance.



Play it Forward performing at Newberry College

### Master Class with Sonia Lee

January 10, 2020

On January 10th, concert virtuoso Sonia Lee gifted the students of Play it Forward a free Master Class. Her instruction centered around musical stance and the proper way to hold an instrument. She used relatable imagery to help the young students



Sonia Lee dazzles audience at winter concert

grasp advanced concepts. The students were starstruck to meet the idol of their concert in person, and the lessons learned were invaluable.

## Upcoming Events



Teachers Andrew Lynn, MA and Tzu/Ying Lao

## Summer Concert

7:00 PM June 4th, 2020

The students of the Play it Forward string ensemble will perform a year-end concert, joined by guest concert virtuosos. If pandemic conditions make it impossible to perform live, this event will be an online opportunity for students to show off their hard work. It will also allow the community to support the foundation and its talented students.

## Registration for Fall Semester

The date will be announced via the newsletter to your email address or on our facebook page. Sign ups can be found at the bottom of the website's homepage or on our facebook page The Becker Family Foundation. You may also email us at [info@beckerfamilyfoundation.com](mailto:info@beckerfamilyfoundation.com). We anticipate two classes; an advanced class and a beginners class. Our expectations of the Play it Forward String Ensemble can be found in the student handbook. We will be happy to email an example of the 2019-2020 handbook upon request. Thirty students will be accepted into the beginner level class. Experienced students will be auditioned for acceptance into the advanced class.

## Want to Get Involved?

1. We need your help in building our email list. We are hoping to reach 2,500 people by the end of May. You can do this by visiting [www.beckerfamilyfoundation.com](http://www.beckerfamilyfoundation.com). Scroll to the bottom of the page and enter your email address. Please ask your friends and family members to do the same.
2. Please follow the “The Becker Family Foundation” Facebook page! While these first two may not seem important, we have some opportunities that require us to grow our list and doing either of these will help us tremendously.
3. Please consider contributing. We did have several fundraisers disrupted by the current conditions. A \$10.00 gift is welcome and appreciated! The amount is not as important as having a broad base of contributors. There is a paypal link at [www.beckerfamilyfoundation.com](http://www.beckerfamilyfoundation.com) or a check can be mailed to:

The Becker Family Foundation  
PO Box 517  
Chapin, SC 29036

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### Student Spotlight Henry Brazell

Henry started with the Play it Forward String Ensemble educational program in February 2019. At just six years old, he was technically too young to join, but an exception was made and Henry began his journey with string instruments. After a short period of time, conductor and teacher Mr. Lynn approached Henry’s mother Rugina regarding possible issues with Henry’s fine mobility skills. This led to a trip to the pediatrician and the realization that Henry did in fact struggle with aspects of his mobility.



“Simply because Mr. Lynn cared enough about Henry to make this observation, we were able to get Henry into occupational therapy, and he is now excelling in fields that he had previously struggled with,” says Rugina Brazell.

This includes music. Because of his love for lessons, Henry has taken to practicing more often, which helps not only his musicianship, but also his mobility. With two cousins who play string instruments (viola and violin), Henry was eager to share his experience with violin, and before long, one of his cousins began to join him in his lessons with Play it Forward String Ensemble. Through music, practice, and a true sense

of family with the foundation, Henry is thriving and counting the minutes until his next lesson via Zoom!

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## Becker Family Spotlight

### Carl F. Becker



Carl F. Becker, (December 16th, 1919 – January 30, 2013) was an American luthier and restorer. He had the reputation of “one of America’s finest violin makers” and “the dean of American violin making”.

Carl Becker was a member of the International Association of Violin and Bow Makers (Entente Internationale des Lutheris et Atchetiers) and a founding member of the American Federation of Violin and Bowmakers. Several important American luthiers trained under his guidance including his children, Jennifer and Paul Becker, Peter Beare, Eric Benning, Frederick Bethke, Rob Braun, Rafael Carabbas, Michael Lockwood, Michael McMann, Whitney Osterud, Daniel Prier, Charles Rufino, Jake Schultz, Sebastian Zens, and Samuel Zygmontowicz.

Carl was the son of Carl G. and Elsa R. Becker, born in Chicago. He started apprenticing with his father at age 16, while still in school, making cello ribs. After graduating from high school in 1937 he worked for William Lewis & Son Co. under his father’s supervision.

In 1941 Carl was drafted into the Army. He wanted to fly, despite having just a high school diploma, which would generally make piloting aircrafts out of someone’s reach. After rigorous study and training, he was accepted by the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC). He trained pilots in the use of instrument panels. He finished his military career at the rank of Major. After World War II ended, he continued the family tradition of violin making.

In 1948, he married Geraldine Smetana who would be his lifelong partner. They had four children.

From 1946 to 1968 Carl Jr. worked with his father for William Lewis & Son. The partners made their first Carl Becker and Son violin in 1948. In 1968 they opened their own shop in a multi-level building on Burling St. in Chicago. Their shop was offering new instruments, valuable old Italian instruments as well as repair and restoration services. The shop moved to Belmont Ave. in Chicago in 1972. With few exceptions, all Carl Becker and Son violins constructed between 1946 and 1975 were made jointly by father and son who divided the labor. Together they made over 770 instruments.

Carl Jr. made his first violin in 1946, after the death of his father in 1975, he by himself made 13 instruments. His time was spent in the restoration of fine instruments, serving musicians and training apprentices. Much of his violin-making happened at a secluded cabin in Wisconsin, where he had a workshop built over the garage and enjoyed fishing. His time in Chicago was devoted to repairing and restoring violins. During 1970 and 1971 Carl Becker Jr. restored the famous Lady Blunt 1721 Stradivarius Violin. Shortly after the restoration, the owner of the violin sold it at auction for the record amount of \$201,600.



1721 Stradivarius Violin. Shortly after the restoration, the owner of the violin sold it at auction for the record amount of \$201,600.

This same instrument was again auctioned to raise money for the victims of the Tsunami in Japan – the auction price was \$16,900,000. The landmark recognition of Carl Becker’s restoration marked one of the rare instances where a luthier is recognized for their work.

Carl F. Becker's children, Jennifer and Paul, continued the family tradition of violin making. Jennifer started her first violin in 1966 at age 11 and completed it at age 15. In 1970 (at the age of 16) she joined the company full-time. In 1978 she moved to Minneapolis and started her own business, Jennifer Becker & Company. Paul Becker joined the company in 1971 at the age of 14. He is the current owner of Carl Becker and Son.

After a life of love and dedication to his craft, Carl Becker passed away in January of 2013 at the age of 93, leaving behind a family legacy that would live on through his children.

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## Testimonials - Chapin High School Orchestra Students

“I would like to thank The Becker Family Foundation for loaning me a very nice violin for a few months to practice and perform with. The violin was a lovely instrument to play, and I especially enjoyed performing this recent fall and winter with the quartet. It was such an exciting and memorable time! Having this violin for those months was such a great privilege. I will definitely remember this for years to come. I cannot thank you enough for giving me this amazing opportunity!”

- Sara Elgin

“Before borrowing this instrument (which I lovingly named “Crabbitha), I struggled with stage fright, especially in front of crowds. I was fairly confident in my abilities, but whenever I’d perform, my hands would shake so much that I couldn’t get a clear sound and would freeze up. Playing an instrument of this quality gave me the motivation to start practicing again. All this to say, without the opportunity to play Crabbitha, I truly believe I would still have all of the stage fright and performance anxiety that I had before. I’ve seen myself grow so much over the last few months, and I want to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to launch such growth.”

- Alyssa Raynor



“Thank you for giving my peers and I the opportunity to play at the Chapin Women’s Club event. It was such an amazing experience being able to perform for the crowd. Even though it was just a different violin, I felt as if my ability as a musician has improved so much. I would have never had an opportunity to play such an amazing violin if it weren’t for you [Marilyn Becker] and Mr. Lynn. This experience let me advance greatly in my musical skills and I also gained confidence that allowed me to play in front of an audience. I can’t thank you enough for the life-changing experience!”

- Catherine Chu

“Thank you so much for offering my peers and I the opportunity to play at the Chapin Women’s Club. It was actually the first time I have ever done a gig and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Playing and handling those professional violins was a once in a lifetime experience that I am so happy that I was able to undergo. I am beyond grateful to learn about how the violins feel and sound. I truly do miss that violin! Because of this performance, I learned a lot about teamwork, how hard work pays off, and how to work with an expensive violin, all thanks to you!”

- Yoshene Ma

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## Board of Directors - Becker Family Foundation

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### Contact Information

The Becker Family Foundation • PO Box 517 • Chapin, SC • 29036  
If you have any questions, contact Paul Becker at 708.220.9895  
[info@beckerfamilyfoundation.com](mailto:info@beckerfamilyfoundation.com)

\*Denotes founding members

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## Special Thanks

We would like to extend special thanks to incredible artists Sonia Lee, violin, Steve Wogeman, piano, and Francis Wogeman, French horn for their incredible performance. Our students grew and challenged themselves to learn in ways that would not have been possible without your knowledge and gracious support. Additional thanks to performers Dr. Chris Sheppard and the Newberry College Singers who gave an awe-inspiring performance at our concert.

Special thanks to Jonathon Toben for providing online cello lessons to our students during this time.

Special thanks to Kasey Schroer, editor of the Winter and Spring Newsletter.



The Becker Family (BF) Foundation, a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) charitable organization, was founded in 2018 to expand awareness of and appreciation for stringed instruments. It provides services and funding for violin, viola and cello stringed instrument education, research, performances, and artists, to benefit listeners and learners alike.