



TAKE IT BEYOND THE CONCERT HALL

with From the Top Alum
Maria Sanderson



Maria Sanderson is an 18-year-old violinist from Morgantown, Indiana. She performed on *From the Top* on show [330](#) and is a [Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist](#).

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TEACHING WITH THE FAIRVIEW VIOLIN PROJECT

What It Is:

18-year-old violinist Maria Sanderson visited her local elementary school to share music with young violin students in Bloomington, Indiana’s Fairview Violin Project. Though she had previously volunteered as an assistant teacher in the program, this was Maria’s first experience leading her own sessions. She led four hour-long classes with over 100 students, in which she connected with them through her own story and created games to accompany her repertoire and keep the students engaged.

Why It Matters:

Maria had plenty of musical role models growing up: all three of her older siblings also played violin. But after visiting an elementary school as part of her outreach experience on *From the Top*, she realized that she could be a role model for other young violinists in her community. She wanted to give younger students an idea of what music could give them – the power of expression, inspiration, and being able to connect with others. Through working with students, Maria found her own inspiration to continue crafting interactive performances and sharing her love of classical music with new audiences.



Above: While playing Paganini’s 5th Caprice, Maria encourages students to raise their hands when they hear arpeggios.



Q&A WITH MARIA

From the Top (FTT): How did you prepare to teach these classes?

Maria: I had been a “helper teacher” in this program before, but I’d never led my own classes. It takes a lot of material to fill an hour! I originally planned for it to be more like a regular classical concert - I had a script memorized for the entire time. But I had to throw my script out the window a bit and be flexible – I couldn’t just stand in front of them and give a speech for that long. I tried to have a lot of games planned to keep them engaged and involved, and I picked whichever fit the students’ moods and interest in the moment.

FTT: Tell me more about the games you played.

Maria: One game the students didn’t want to end was with “Happy Birthday.” I asked them to give me creatures, and then I played the melody like that character - aliens (harmonics), a beetle (pizzicato), and others. It helped them understand all the different sounds and emotions my violin could make. I also wanted them to feel connected to me and to classical music. For example, when I played Paganini’s 5th Caprice, I had them raise and lower their hands to corresponding arpeggios. It kept them interested and listening to the music, and having them demonstrate the motions made me play differently and stay engaged as well.

FTT: What did you learn from teaching these classes?

Maria: Having four classes was like having four tries at the material. I could really see what worked and what didn’t keep the students’ attention, and then I could adjust it for the next class. I was the main teacher in the room, so even though I’m very introverted, I had to learn



how to balance being authoritative and fun leading all the students. But mostly, I was inspired by the kids: how interested they were and how much they really loved the classical music, even though they didn’t know it before. They had lots of deep questions about how you can express yourself through music, and I loved being able to share my story and see it make an impact.

FTT: What advice would you give to other musicians interested in teaching?

Maria: Be well prepared with lots of “back-up” plans, and make sure everything you’re doing is fun and interesting. I went through my music, games, and script beforehand, and if I got bored doing any of them, I replaced them with something else. When you’re speaking or performing a piece, you have to exaggerate a little and make it engaging - it will make you interact differently too! You have to respond to the energy in the room and be flexible. The students can tell when you’re really present and have energy, and they give that back to you.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MARIA!](#)