

September 2023

Dearest Apple Hill Lovers,

I wanted to first thank you for your extreme generosity with all that you do to make it possible for participants to attend Apple Hill every summer. I have heard for years and years from my closest friends that Apple Hill is a place where you can truly find yourself and I am so lucky to have had the experience myself this past summer. Not only was Apple Hill so beautiful and refreshing, it made me realize some really important things about myself and the music I love so much. Before I go into more detail about the values I learned from AH, I wanted to share a little about myself to help you understand why this experience has been so meaningful to me.

My name is D'aci Knight and I have been playing Viola seriously since I was 14, and I am now 23. I began lessons in Los Angeles with a great violist, Helen Callus, who has some of my absolute favorite recordings out there. I started my path doing the Colburn Community School and homeschooled until it was time to do conservatory. I don't know why or how I knew music was my path, it just felt right. I first went to the Oberlin Conservatory for a year and then transferred to the Cleveland Institute of Music to be with my current teacher, Mark Jackobs. After these years of doing gigs and studying hard in school, I always felt like I was missing something in my playing and especially in my soul. It wasn't until I finally came to Apple Hill that I was able to see music and people with fresh eyes and a big heart. It was a breakthrough that I've needed for my entire life. I not only felt seen, I felt accepted and loved. I've never been in an environment in classical music before where I have been free to actually be myself. For a very long time, I wasn't even sure that it was possible to do that. I had become someone less open and curious about music and it felt like I had to put on a serious persona to survive the criticism and stress I put on myself in school. Apple Hill truly saved me.

Not only was I allowed to bring back the child-like curiosity and love for music again, I was allowed to let the music breathe as if it were alive. This was a concept I had never experienced before. I had heard concerts that had brought me to tears, but never had I felt my heart move to a safe place while playing with other people before. It felt like a miracle! In two weeks, I went from being so fearful of exposing any emotional qualities in my playing, to playing my heart out and feeling proud for the first time in my life. I wish every day that I could go back and experience what I had felt in that barn again. Even as I sit here now, I feel like the magic I experienced at Apple Hill permanently changed my path in life. I am back in school and I want so badly to share what I learned at AH with my peers, but it is something you have to experience first-hand. It is hard to even describe the magical atmosphere AH has but, I absolutely fell in love with the place, the festival, and the people. I will be forever grateful for those who have made it possible for me to attend Apple Hill, not only did you bring back the spark I thought I had lost years ago, you opened my eyes to a new and exciting world of music I never knew was possible.

With deepest thanks and excitement,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D'aci Knight". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

D'aci Knight