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Transcript

Stella Sung: We have the opportunity to be totally creative. Totally creative. And UCF has an opportunity to be a part of that in a really big way.

James Evans: Hello and welcome back to another episode of Knights Do That! We are interviewing Dr. Stella Sung on the show today. Dr. Sung is a renowned composer, Pegasus Professor, Trustee Chair Professor, and Director of CREATE at UCF. Her work at UCF spans decades and her academic career is non-linear to say the least. Starting as a music professor in the School of Performing Arts, Dr. Sung now brings her expertise to the School of Visual Arts and Design, where she works to inspire future generations of animators and empowers them to use music and sound to elevate their storytelling.

We're going to discuss what it means to hold these titles, the importance of integrating science and the arts, and her research regarding using virtual and augmented reality in the classical concert setting.

Thank you Dr. Sung for being here today. How are you?

Stella Sung: Thank you. It's great to be here with you.

James Evans: It's fantastic.

How did you develop your passion for music? That's such an important part of your identity and what you provide to UCF and your community. Did you always know that you wanted to be a composer?

Stella Sung: I started as a kid taking piano lessons, so actually I'm trained as a classical pianist.

My undergraduate degree is from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and is in piano performance. And then I kind of veered a little bit off to doing a master's degree in composition. I thought it was just going to be something to explore and, you know, just kind of do. And so I have a master's from UF in that.

And then I still felt like I could be a good pianist and make a career out of that. So I went to the University of Texas at Austin and did my doctorate in piano. But you know, life has interesting paths for us and some that we know and we don't know. And I started working more and more as a composer.

And got a lot of inspiration and encouragement in that way, just getting things published from major publishers that I never thought I would ever have that kind of opportunity. The signs were there that I should just kind of keep writing music and I kept getting commissions and working with wonderful artists and orchestra.

Ensemble soloists. I had an opportunity to write a piece for Yoyo Ma, who was, you know, a world-famous cellist, right?

And that was kind of a really sort of marvelous opportunity to say, “Hey, this is, this is neat to connect to these world class artists doing the work that I do.”

I didn’t really start off as being a composer at all.

It took me a while to think of myself because I wasn’t planning to do that. You know, when I started writing music, I would always feel that it came naturally, it came easily. It was work, but it was sort of, I got into that zone of creativity where, you know, you kind of lose track of time and all that.

And I got to that place when I was a pianist as well, but not in the same way. And I think the turning point for me was I was awarded a fellowship at the McDowell Colony, which is in New Hampshire. And lots of well-known artists of various different kinds have gone to the McDowell Colony to do their thing. And so, it’s a beautiful place. It was set up by an American composer named Edward McDowell, and I think it’s like 400 acres. Just this beautiful New Hampshire area and every artist has their own studio. A little studio, very simple. Piano and restroom area and a little couch or something, and then a table. And that’s about it. And so it’s a very simple sort of thing.

And at that time, I didn’t have a cellphone. There were no TV or anything. So you’re just out there doing your art, right? And all the cabins, all the studios are separated pretty far away from each other. And in fact, you know, artists are asked not to bother other people. You’re kind of just doing your thing. And then we meet for meal at the main house and that sort of thing. So there is some socialization.

I had a residency for a month in beautiful September, October, where the leaves are so fantastically changing and beautiful. And I took a project there and a set of three songs that was going to write on poetry by Robert Frost. And it was just this turning point where started writing this music, finished the piece in a couple of weeks. and I thought, this is really what I want to do. This is really who I think I can be and make an impact and make a make a difference with this work.

And so I think that was really kind of like the turning point that I said, “OK, aha.” You know, it’s one of those aha moments, right? Where I thought, “Yep. OK, I can call myself a composer:

James Evans: That’s amazing. And now you’re a composer that also does a lot of work with documentaries.

You’ve been credited as a composer on several award-winning documentaries. Can you, A, explain that experience to me, but also explain your perception both on yourself and the work you do as a storyteller

Stella Sung: Yeah. So I've actually been really fortunate to hooked up with wonderful filmmakers One is Dr. Lisa Mills. And so I've been fortunate to work with her on her documentaries and also Aaron Hose. And Aaron is a graduate from our school. And I think at the time working actually in communications or in instructional research or something. And so I wrote music for his documentary film called *Voices in the Clouds*. So I've always had an interest in visual things that connect to the arts and to the visual film or so on. I think it's probably, because my mom is an artist, as a painter. I always had paintings and visual things all around the house. So I've always been aware of that and I've always liked including multimedia stuff in my work as a composer. So film kind of just was natural.

And I think the challenge of writing music for documentaries particularly is really interesting because you're helping to tell the story that's already being told through the documentary subjects. The music has to support the action or the words or the mood but not interfere. We're not there to create the big, landscape or the big score for these action types of things. It's much more subtle in documentary films. I really enjoy that though. I really find that's it's a great way to get to know different subjects learn some new things. And I still love writing for (that) medium.

James Evans: I'm going to switch gears a little bit because I could talk about this forever, but I, I also want to get into this idea, not even this idea. I just want to understand, you've been with UCF for quite a while, for several years, many moons. And I want to walk through that. I want to understand, what was UCF at the time? What do you think of it now? That progression that we've had what are your thoughts on UCF's journey and your entanglement with it, right? As somebody who's been here for quite a while, you've seen us grow exponentially. And I'm sure that that's an interesting, insightful perspective. And I'm very curious about your thoughts.

Stella Sung: Yeah, so I, started out at UCF as a fill-in for professors in the music department who were going on sabbaticals.

James Evans: Mm-hmm.

Stella Sung: And I, at the time, I was finishing up my degree at the University of Texas at Austin. So I was, I'd done all the coursework and was ready to look for a job. But I was still working on my dissertation, just had to do my lecture and recitals. And I got a call from a pianist who I had studied privately with at the time, Gary Wolfe, and he was in the music department, and he was going on sabbatical. So I got a call and he said, "Oh, will you be interested in teaching?" So, of course, (I say), "Sure, that'd be great." And then they also said, "Well, and our music theory teacher and our class piano teacher, they're going on sabbatical in the spring, so can you teach music theory and can you teach piano class?" I said, "Sure." You know, I mean, when you're young, you'll just go for all the opportunities, right?

When I first got to UCF we were about 18,000. And there was like one, two fraternity houses. There was a McDonald's and a Pizza Hut, and that was about it around, And there was really not a whole lot and University Boulevard was just like two lanes. Alafaya was a two-lane, rough,

paved road. And I thought, “Oh, I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m going to come out here and teach.” So that’s where I started, and then everybody came back from sabbatical. And so, I went to Paris to work with a composer that I had studied with at Austin, and he was an American but lived in Paris, and I had always wanted to go to Europe and live in Europe, so I was able to do that.

And then I got a call and they said, “Well, one of our musicology teachers is going to become an associate dean.” And so the music theory teacher said, “Well, I’ll do musicology, but I need somebody to help teach music theory.” So I came back as a visiting instructor.

James Evans: Mm-hmm.

Stella Sung: And it became a tenure-earning line. I applied for the job. It was a competitive search. But I ultimately ended up with the job and I’ve been here at UCF ever since. It’s been a wonderful place. I will have to say one of the great things about UCF is it allowed, and it still allows, lots of room for exploration. It’s not tied to — it’s not a 200-year-old university where all these, you know, traditions and so on are just sort of stuck there. And I, think for me, UCF was a perfect fit because I always like exploring new things. I always like to look at what else can we do. And so, I was in the music department and it was a great run while I was there. I did end up moving my tenure and professorship to, at the time, digital media. Partly because I wanted to explore some new things. And partly because it felt like it was a necessary change. So, again, you know, where life takes you to different paths and you just never really know.

And so I started working with our animation unit and fell in love about all of our animation students and the whole idea of marrying music to animation. And that was just a perfect fit for me.

James Evans: Yeah, absolutely. And now you’re the director of CREATE, which conducts multidisciplinary research around science and the arts. Can you give us more insight into that experience being the director, but also the work you’re doing there? What kind of impacts does that have?

Stella Sung: Sure. So CREATE stands for the Center for Research and Education in Arts, Technology and Entertainment. And we are located at UCF Downtown. We’ve been there for about 17 years. So we’ve actually been there before UCF Downtown was established, but UCF had a building down there and so we were part of that.

We have our offices downtown. And I was asked to take over, create about 17 years ago. And at the time I really didn’t know what it was, but I knew it was down. So part of our emphasis has been to become a sort of outreach unit for our college and for UCF so that we can connect to the community, we can connect to our partners downtown and around in the city.

We do a lot of community outreach, and we were doing after school programs. We do summer camps, so we’re working with kids and high school students primarily to have a way for UCF

folks to have a connection to the community where they might not normally have that. Because, you know, when we're on our campus, we're sort of in our little bubble world on the campus.

I think that it's a good thing to be able to reach out to the community and find ways to connect to the community. Now what we do in our programming has been to use. And technology to try to train and give skills to students and members of our community to bring them another aspect of what art and technology can do in enriching your lives and to look at how art and technology can be sort of married together. Not so much separated, you know, we always sort of think of science and we always think of art, right? And, and they're sort of like separate things. In my view, they're actually much more closely related.

We do a similar process with sciences. It's sometimes we're experimenting, you know, sciences. I love working with scientists because I think their brains are kind of, they are exploratory. And we do that in the arts. We don't know exactly what we're going to end up with, but we had that same process.

So what we do at CREATE is to try to bring that concept into reality. For example, now we are working with high school students in animation and teaching animation. Well, animation involves math, it involves sciences, it involves geometry, it involves computer technology and then it also involves arts. It's a visual language. It's a storytelling language. So you know, that's a beautiful medium to illustrate how science and art and technology all come together.

James Evans: Yeah. And what lessons have you learned over the past 17 years of working at CREATE? I mean, you've surely seen it grown. You've surely seen UCF Downtown become a thing.

Stella Sung: Yeah.

James Evans: Probably before we even having conversations about it. Right,

Stella Sung: Right.

James Evans: What lessons, what takeaways do you have from that experience and what are you looking to do in the future with that?

Stella Sung: It's an amazing opportunity, an amazing time to grasp all the things that are coming up. The technology, the ability to find new technologies and put those and use those in the arts, it's absolutely tremendous. I've been doing work with VR and AR and with my colleagues in digital media actually. And I think that one of the projects that I've been doing is trying to find ways where VR and mixed reality can be used in a live concert setting. To have this opportunity and to be located downtown, where there's a lot of stuff happening, where there's community efforts, there are businesses like Electronic Arts, which is located now in downtown, and to be in that kind of mix it just is a really great time for UCF to be a part of all of

that. It's very exciting actually. It really is. I mean, we do a lot of great things on campus, but we also have things that are on that cutting edge when we're not just siloed in our own areas here, but that we can actually be connecting to businesses and organizations outside of UCF.

James Evans: Can you walk us through that idea of partnership? How does that happen? How does partnership, how does collaboration, how does community engagement happen at CREATE? And, taking those things to the next level?

Stella Sung: One of our main emphasis is partnerships. And we've built a lot of great partnerships with Orlando Science Center, for example.

And in fact, we just had a meeting here recently. Their Otronicon event, which has been going on for, I think, 15 years now (started in 2006). They're rebranding it as Spark Fest and they want actually to involve more UCF people. So I've been trying to sort of be a little catalyst to connecting them to as many UCF folks as we can.

It's about a three, four day event and it brings anywhere from 12 to 13,000 people into the science center. it's a wonderful opportunity for UCF to showcase all of our great initiatives that we have, the projects that we have, the departments we have. medical school, nursing, school engineering computer sciences, all these great things that can come down together.

So partnership is really important for us. A few years ago, CREATE received a Disney grant, one of those nice Disney grants in partnership with our local community organization called Page 15. And they work with kids and young adults in developing literacy skills. So they do poetry, writing, reading, all those kinds of literacy skills.

So we did a partnership and hosted several summer camps with Page 15. So again, you know, finding other ways where UCF can be a part of the lives of these people that we don't necessarily normally reach out to. Part of our mission is to be able to say, "Hey, UCF is a place that you could be a part of, and we want to be a part of your life."

And that's what's so wonderful about the work that we do. I think at CREATE we're just we're really about trying to bridge, to make bridges happen.

One of our current projects is we're working with Continuing Education. And the state of Florida has now mandated that there's a financial component that must be taught in all of the high schools, and that'll start next fall. So, our instructional designer, Tracy Morrison, has been working on developing online courses. And so she's working with Continuing Ed to deliver that content. So that's another aspect. What we're doing is, trying to find ways where we can help teachers teach students about financial literacy.

James Evans: That's really interesting. So it's not just about empowering students, obviously that's, the crux of it. That's the core of it. It's also about empowering their instructors,

empowering the community or, or our campus partners or our corporate partners to be able to engage with us in that mission.

That's fascinating. I love it. So along that same thought, research and professorship and all of the wonderful things you're doing, you're also a Pegasus Professor and a trustee professor. Can you give us the insight into that? What do those things mean and what do they mean for you?

Stella Sung: Sure. Well, I guess as professors are generally senior professors here at UCF, it's a wonderful award and one, I think, (that) carries responsibility, as well as the trustees chair award.

But the Pegasus Professor award is I think one that we value highly because mostly it's awarded to professors who have shown that they've reached a certain pinnacle in their careers and also have reached either recognition nationally or internationally for their work.

For research in my area, for example, is creative activities. But you know, we have several professors who are throughout the university in, various different fields. So those professorships are really meaningful and, again, carry responsibility. I look at the Pegasus Professorships as a responsibility to maintain a level of excellence, to be a role model for showing that. We keep working hard, keep your eye on the goals, work with our students, work with our staff and our colleagues, and try to make sure that we are pushing UCF and our goals forward. So that's one aspect of what I believe the Pegasus Professorships do.

The trustees chair professorships don't always come up. I'm very honored to have received that now twice and it carries with it a financial award part to one's personal finances, but also part to the unit that you are in. So, that award can be used towards furthering a research project in my case, maybe creative projects or as I actually use our funds for CREATE and using it in various different ways to support our work.

Those two particular awards, I think, the university gives out to try to recognize professors that you know have reached a certain distinguished area in their work.

James Evans: It's really important that we're looking at the university, we're looking at our faculty and empowering them, finding ways to give back to them and give them the resources and give them the recognition needed to continue to do the amazing things that they do. What kind of projects have you been able to do or further down been able to invest in, to create?

Stella Sung: Yeah. So the trustee's professorship, but that's the one we're kind of talking about right now. [It] allows us a certain amount of financial support and people can use it in various different ways. And what I've been doing is, I used some of my money to support UCF Celebrates the Arts, which is a wonderful yearly event that we have downtown. Bringing the arts to downtown and giving opportunities for the orchestra, chorus, band, performing arts to be in the Dr. Phillips Center. And now in the new Steinmetz Hall. So for example, this past spring, we did my large-scale orchestra work called [Oceania](#), and I was able to invite professors

from UCF, our biology professors from UCF, Dr. (Kate) Mansfield and Dr. Linda Walters, to be a part of the panel as well as a senior scientist from the New England Aquarium Scott Krause. And so I had these scientists with me and also the filmmaker that did a film that went with my piece. So I was able to bring us all together and have a panel and where we discussed the problems of ocean noise pollution, which is what my piece is a little bit about and also the work that our scientists are doing. So for example Dr. [\(Kate\) Mansfield who is a turtle specialist talked about her work with turtles](#) and Dr. [\(Linda\) Walters, who is our oyster specialist](#), she talked about oyster reefs and why those are important for us. And so we gave the audience a chance to say, "What else?" Not only [what] UCF professors do, but what are the concerns, the greater concerns for our environment? So I used part of my funding to invite these people over on the totally opposite spectrum. The next project that we're looking at is working with Keith Harrison, who is in the DeVos School. And he is very good friends with Reggie Saunders. So Mr. Saunders is the VP for Jordan, Nike brand. They're all into kind of hip-hop artists. And so next year is the sort of 50th anniversary of hip-hop. So we would like to bring Mr. Saunders in as a guest speaker, and sort of figure out how we can marry hip-hop and sports, because there's actually quite a big connection there.

So that's another way that I plan to use some of our funding.

James Evans: That's amazing. I want to give you the space and the time to kind of throw in a Celebrates the Arts ad here. OK. Because I think that's great and I think Celebrates the Arts is one of UCF's traditions that doesn't get as much recognition as, you know, Spirit Splash, right? That's a huge one everybody talks about. Lots of our athletic events gets a lot of attention. You know, Celebrate the Arts provides these opportunities not only for our performers to do their work and do their jobs and give back to their community, it also allows for these amazing collaborations and connections.

So I want to give you the space right here and now to kind of put in the middle of the podcast an ad about Celebrate the Arts, tell the audience about it, what are you excited about? And give us the information on it.

Stella Sung: Yeah. Happy to do that. It's an amazing event that happens over a course of two weeks. It's sort of the brainchild of our dean, Jeff Moore, who is a percussionist, a musician, but he put together this idea of having the Celebrates the Arts where we bring all of the arts, performing arts as well as visual arts, together to do this celebration. We go downtown and we set up our things. We set up our exhibits. We do the performances. There's an amazing array of performances from the school of music and theater. So we have theater, we have orchestra, band, chorus, jazz band, all parts of the performing arts, and then we have our visual arts. So our artists, our painters will bring their paintings and they go on display. And then we also have our animation units. So our animation students and units get to show their films. So we also have screen.

It's a huge array of things that you can go down and participate in. Most are very inexpensive tickets. And some are free and it's a great place to bring family down to have a day or evening of enjoying a wonderful event.

This past spring, they did *Shrek the Musical* and it was great. It was in the Disney Hall. It was great. And then they did my orchestra piece as well as showcase other parts of the orchestra with *Beethoven Symphony No. 6*. And some animation that was done to that piece by our animation students.

And this is really a wonderful way to showcase all these things that UCF does. And I hope that as we move along, more people will come out more people from the community will come out and enjoy it and get to know some of the things that UCF is able to offer. It's an amazing event. I hope that we can bring as many people down as possible.

James Evans: It absolutely is. I got to see *Shrek* last year and it was fantastic. Really.

Stella Sung: And these are student performers, they are Broadway-quality performers. I mean, they're learning their craft, they're learning their art. But in that process they really come to the top. It's so impressive. It really is. And to see these young people giving their absolute 100% plus to performing is just a thrill.

James Evans: Absolutely right. Do we have a set month or set date already for this upcoming spring, or is that still in conversation?

Stella Sung: We do. I don't remember the dates, but it's usually in April. OK,

James Evans: Awesome. I'm really curious, are you looking into the future to be able to incorporate more of the STEAM and the connections, not only with your research, right?

I could very easily see in the next five to 10 years having a performance that includes VR, AR, MR into a Celebrates the Arts performance. Is that where you're looking to do, where you kind of planning on going with that over, the course of the next few years?

Stella Sung: Yeah, so I, my personal belief is, technology is going to drive the future of the arts. I really believe that. I've already done some of this with my operas, which had digital projections, 3d animation in the digital set where the animation actually made the set come alive. And in *Oceania* we did a little bit of an experiment where I had a VR headsets, as well as the HoloLens, two headsets being used during the performance. So this was kind of a trial to see.

But my belief is that this is going to drive the next interactivity for live performances. It'll take a little while, but I believe that our young people, and I believe the next generation of people, want to be engaged, want to be actively a part of any performance.

I can envision people bringing their own headsets, right? Being able to experience that either in MR or AR or VR and hearing the live music, seeing the live music and experiencing it in a different way. So with VR, of course, your headset is, you don't see the things around you, but you can hear, you can hear the stuff going around you in the mixed reality. In the HoloLens, too, you can see everything that's going on and. Basically holograms are being put forth for you. So this is a really cool thing because for example, what we did was in *Oceania*, we I worked with some of my colleagues in digital media, John Murray, Dr. Murray, and his students, and we developed a prototype. For example, whales that were swimming around in the, if you will, swimming around in the concert hall. But they were large life size. So as you're sitting there, you're hearing and seeing the orchestra, right? But you're also seeing the superimposed layer of digital assets. And it just completely gives you a different experience of interactivity.

I truly believe that this is going to be the future for live performances and engaging people in a different way using technology.

James Evans: I couldn't agree more. I've had the chance to talk to [Peter \(Weishar, director of UCF's themed experience program\)](#) and his work with the themed experience program, and getting those students ready for the real world and providing a whole new a program that's focused in on themed experiences. And most people, again, think theme parks, right? Which makes sense, but it's well beyond that. It's in your everyday life. And I'm so curious to see how technology is going to start to move. I mean, it already is in our everyday lives, but products like a HoloLens too, as people begin to use them for performances or for experiences regularly, right?

Like we already had Google try their smart glasses a couple years ago, right? So we're obviously moving in that direction and I'm so intrigued by how we can not only set up spaces, per Peter's episode, and create rooms and spaces and entire experiences built for human use. And providing and telling that story through the environment that you're in, but also then bringing in a whole new environment, a virtual environment, right? That adds onto that.

I think that's fascinating. As we're moving in two directions as a university. Where we're telling a story with the physical environment that's here and we're also telling a story with the rest of our senses.

What else are you seeing that's not in the physical environment? What are you feeling that's not in the physical environment? So I guess it's not the rest of your senses, but it's a second level. It's more, what's going on? And I think that's fascinating.

Stella Sung: It is, it is. And you know, and I'll make a plug for UCF, too, because we are blessed that we have all these wonderful technology areas here, in Orlando, businesses and companies that are here in Orlando. And it's a great way to interface with those companies. We're blessed with fantastic faculty and students who want to push that envelope. Who want to take that step and go forward in looking at ways in where we could create that third dimension between, audience and presenter.

Theme-park experience, for example, is really cool because in a theme park we have the theme-park reality. That is you're in the park, but somebody else presented that reality to you. So the theme park makers are the sort of presenters, if you will. And then when you go to the theme park, you're like the audience, but you step out of your audience mode and become interactive. And so you've created a third dimension, if you will, of an experience. So theme parks do this so well because they really know how to capture our imagination and our participation in a really active way, where we're not really thinking about what we were. And we're not really thinking about who made that necessarily, although Disney, of course, brands everything, right?

But it doesn't matter because you're so engrossed in it that you, you become something else. You go to a different experience and that's why people love theme parks you get to a different place.

James Evans: Related to this, but not entirely to theme parks. I want to pick your brain about something. There's a phrase, a word, whatever you want to call it, that I've been hearing recently, and I think you're going to have some good insight into this. Orlando is working towards becoming Meta City. Capital of the metaverse. We want to be the home, the hub of where the metaverse grows and shapes and forms and builds, and your work and your research.

And a lot of UCF's work and research is at the crux of that development, right? How are we combining the human experience to this entirely new place that's completely virtual? How are we bridging that gap where it's not entirely virtual and people can move in and progress into that?

What are your thoughts on Orlando becoming and wanting to be Meta City, wanting to be capital of the metaverse? I just want to hear your thoughts on that.

Stella Sung: I personally think it can happen. I really do. I mean, Orlando is a place that is moving forward. It's growing rapidly. It's attracting new businesses, it's attracting new companies, it's attracting technology.

You know, our medical school, our nursing school, these things are involved with the human factors. They're all growing. They're busting at the seams, basically. So we have the opportunity to do this. We have the opportunity to be totally creative. Totally creative. And UCF has an opportunity to be a part of that in a really big way.

We've got it. We can do it. We have all the resources here to make that metaverse, you know, to be that hub, if you will, to attract our young people to attract the creatives as well as the technical people, as well as the engineers.

All these kinds of things combined, we've got the hugest, the greatest ability to do it. We just need to do it, we just need to step forward and we need creative people to think about it and

be a part of it. We've got business who are ready to fund it. So I think we've got all kinds of possibilities and I would love to be a part of that.

James Evans: I've had the fortune of talking to several researchers and just being exposed to many more. And I'm constantly seeing work that's pushing the edge of academia, pushing us forward in some very innovative and creative ways. And I just sit there in awe.

Stella Sung: I'm learning a part of it too.

James Evans: Exactly. You know, despite me being an accounting major and there's not a lot of research going on in accounting, I don't think, to see and be exposed to how much our academic units and our faculty are pushing forward their fields and pushing forward this region. It's fascinating.

Stella Sung: It is. It's a great time to be here and it's a great time to be at UCF and we've got a huge a wonderful, wonderful future ahead of us. Our old slogan was Reach for the Stars, and I think we're getting there.

James Evans: Oh, absolutely. What advice would you give to someone who wants to do what you do or even just succeed like you have?

Stella Sung: Just do the best work you possibly can every day.

The best thing that I try to do is when I come to work, when I work with our students, give 100%. That's all you can actually do really, I think, is do your best work. Always keep a level of excellence in your forefront. Everything isn't always going to be perfect, but you be flexible and learn and be ready to explore.

James Evans: I, as a student, engage and respond best to the teachers and the professors that are most engaged back, right? Are you doing something great that's inspiring? How are you sharing it with your students and then pushing them, right? You were saying, "This is where I'm headed. This is what's going on. This is what we're doing. How are you going to be a part of that?" I think presenting that challenge to students of, can you beat me? Can you match me? Can you put your energy in and provide something back? And can you do it for your community? I think those are really great questions that we need to be asking our students.

Stella Sung: Well, and it's true that one of the greatest joys is when the student succeeds and exceeds the master. I have some wonderful students who have gone on to great careers who are out, out in LA as composers and they're doing really, really well. They're writing music for Netflix. They're writing music for major commercials for the Super Bowl. I mean, these kinds of things that I didn't do, and I'm glad that they are. It makes me really proud that I kind of helped in guiding them through their career paths. And that's our job and that's our passion is to say, "OK, you know, I can show you what I know, but now you show me what you know."

James Evans: I know that's what I want when I become a parent, when I become a teacher, when I become somebody who's a mentor to others. I want them to be able to stand on my shoulders and push farther than I ever even had the ability to dream of, right?

Stella Sung: Yes.

James Evans: That's the goal.

Stella Sung: That is absolutely the goal.

James Evans: So last question. What's one thing you are still hoping to do?

Stella Sung: Oh gosh, there's still a lot out there that I'm hoping to do, but I think we've actually really covered this already I really want to explore how can we make the live concert, the live classical concert experience, more engaging, more interactive, more interesting.

One of the things that I really would love to see before I retire or whenever is seeing that technology married, seeing that technology being used in the concert hall and seeing the success of that and making sure that there's still a future for live classical concerts.

James Evans: I want to thank you. I mean, this has been an amazing conversation. You've really given me some insight that I had no clue about, and you've explained so much more than I even had anticipated for the episode. It's really been a pleasure.

Stella Sung: Well, thank you, James. It's great to be here with you and thank you for your thoughtful and interesting questions.

James Evans: I want to reiterate my thanks to Dr. Sung for being on the show today. Her work and story shows that we can all be mentors, leaders, and life-long learners. As the world continues to be increasingly more digital, we have to reimagine how we tell stories and give future generations the tools to do so. We can also all take away a lesson of personal excellence. It's no small feat to be a well-published and awarded composer.

Speaking of personal excellence, our next episode will be with [Chris Clifford '21, a UCF alum who was our first student be offered the highly selective Gates-Cambridge Scholarship — but actually turned it down to follow another prestigious path](#). Chris now studies and researches at MIT as he is working to cure diabetes, and he shares why this is the best way for him to make a difference.

As always, if you're doing something cool, whether that's at UCF or somewhere you took UCF that we should know about, send us an email at socialmedia@ucf.edu and maybe we'll see you on an episode in the future. Go Knights. Charge on!

Chris Clifford: My motto that I live by is always strive to be the dumbest person in the room. I think that is an amazing way to grow. A lot of people are scared of being in an environment like that, but I pursue environments like that because, if you're the dumbest person in the room, there's only one trajectory really.