



**STUDENT PROFILE:**  
**MINH NGUYEN (D'22)**

## Perfect Harmony

*Second-Year Student Minh Nguyen (D'22) is Balancing his Career Goals in Dentistry with a Lifelong Passion for Music*

When Minh Nguyen's parents and grandparents immigrated to the United States from Vietnam, they overcame significant challenges to provide him with better opportunities. Today, as both a second-year student at Penn Dental Medicine and a skilled pianist for the Penn Medicine Symphony Orchestra (PMSO), he enthusiastically tackles the hurdles and relishes the rewards that his family's sacrifices have made possible.

"The obstacles my family had to face in order to survive and escape a war-torn, poverty-stricken country were very real," the second-year dental student explains. "It seems like a distant memory, but in reality it was only a generation ago."

### LOVE OF MUSIC, SCIENCE

As a toddler in Fountain Valley, California, Minh got his parents' attention when he played Frere Jacques from memory on a toy xylophone, and he began piano lessons a few years later. The strength and sacrifice of his family are why he has viewed his 20 years of musical instruction, practice, and performance as less of a chore and more of an advantage—one that was unavailable to his father, who had also loved music as a boy but could not afford lessons. Along the way, Minh also mastered the organ, and played the violin for several years.

As Minh got older, his love of music was matched by a love of science, and he came to view dentistry in the same way he viewed music: as a way to make people smile by using his hands. He chose Penn Dental Medicine because of a campus environment that fosters individual goals. "Penn Dental will provide you with whatever you need to succeed in the future, whether it is clinical mastery or specialization," he says.

### PASSIONATE PROFESSIONALS

The PMSO was founded in 2016, bringing together medical professionals and students, researchers, and community members—all skilled musicians motivated to make time for the orchestra in their hectic schedules. The 60 member group gathers for rehearsals (every other Tuesday) and performances (twice a year in the spring and fall, and free to the public), both held at Penn's Irvine Auditorium.

Last fall, Minh had the honor of performing as a concert soloist with the group. He chose to perform Camille Saint-Saens Piano Concerto Number 2, a piece with an unconventional progression that is one of his father's favorites.

### A BALANCING ACT

Like many Penn Dental Medicine students, Minh balances extracurricular activities that offer creativity, growth, and relaxation with rigorous academic and clinical demands. His participation in PMSO often requires clever

time management: practicing on his own at lunch and between classes, and leaving rehearsal early to make it to class on time. The extra effort is well worth it, he says—not only to keep his musical skills sharp, but for the rich experience of collaborating with so many members of Penn's medical community.

For Minh, having a routine is an important part of this balancing act. "There are times when I love practicing the piano and times when I detest it due to frustration and fatigue," he says, "but I believe the key to success is practicing regularly despite the setbacks."

"That is also what it takes to be a successful student," he adds.

### PAYING IT FORWARD

Minh envisions himself continuing to balance his passions for dentistry and music after graduation. He hopes to complete a residency in maxillofacial surgery, and to "pay it forward," returning to Vietnam to treat children with cleft lips and palates, and working with other professionals to create better opportunities for people in developing countries.

Regardless of his career path, he believes that music will always be a critical part of his life: "Music is the one language that everyone understands, no matter where they are from."

### MUSIC IN THE AIR AT PENN DENTAL

Putting their musical talents to work in the Penn Medicine Symphony Orchestra alongside Minh Nguyen (D'22) are these Penn Dental Medicine students:

- Richard Che (D'23), Cello
- Dane Kim (D'22), Cello
- Jake Lee, (D'21), Clarinet
- Andrew Ng (D'20), Violin
- Tiana Piscitelli (D'23), Violin

And, while they might not perform in the orchestra, many more Penn Dental Medicine students enjoy making music. For each incoming class, the Office of Admissions asks students if they play an instrument — while there is a host of musical talent across the entire student body, from the admissions information gathered this academic year from the current freshman class, there are students who play: guitar (acoustic and electric), piano, keyboard, organ, Indian percussion instruments, drums, viola, violin, flute, saxophone (alto, baritone and tenor), cello, trumpet, clarinet, Chinese Guzheng, and ukulele.