

MUSIC RUNS IN THE FAMILY

By Tracy Fedkoe



Claire Edwards



Kemper Edwards

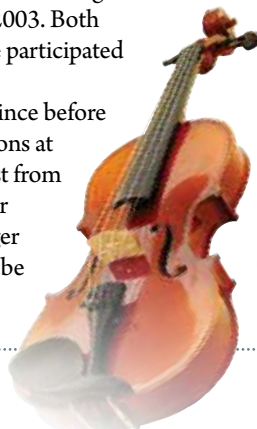
SEWICKLEY SIBLINGS WIN BLACKWOOD MUSIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Aspiring to become professional musicians, Sewickley siblings Kemper and Claire Edwards are well on their way. Kemper will be attending St. John's college at the University of Cambridge, England, and Claire will be heading to Konservatorium Wien in Vienna, Austria, both with scholarships from the Blackwood Theater Organ Society. They were inspired to continue their musical studies overseas, as they were born and grew up in Kent, England, before moving to Sewickley in 2003. Both were trained in the Russian school on violin and have participated in master classes at Kronberg Academy in Germany.

"Music is a part of our family. I have been playing since before I can remember," said Kemper, who began piano lessons at the age of three. Their father was a professional pianist from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto and later worked for Steinway. Claire and Kemper's two younger sisters also play string instruments. "It's wonderful to be able to share that as a family," said their father.

The competition for the Blackwood scholarship each year is tough, but years of preparation have given them both an impressive resume that prepared them for this audition and their continuing studies. "I can only try to imagine the effort my parents have made in helping me with all the extra dedication and passion music requires," said Claire. They are both home schooled and spend up to six hours a day practicing and studying with Rufina Yefimova, formerly of the Moscow Conservatory. Their teacher for nine years, Yefimova said they both rank as "one of my finest pupils on violin".

The musical siblings have also enriched their education through participation in many elite youth music groups. Kemper has performed for the National Society of Arts and Letters and was a member of both the Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra (PYSO), where he toured and played in Tuscany during the PYSO Tour of Italy several years ago. He was a



For more information, visit blackwoodmusic.org.
Photos courtesy of David Diffenderfer and the Edwards family.

Pittsburgh Concert Society Young Artist winner in 2012 and was selected by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Principal Guest Conductor Leonard Slatkin as the winner of the PYSO Conducting Competition.

Kemper auditioned for entrance to St. John's College at Cambridge over a year ago and was accepted, but they didn't have a spot for him until October 2015. After he graduated from high school in 2014, he spent a year studying with Rufina and focusing on music. "I have grown in leaps and bounds in harmony study and I am a different musician now," said Kemper. With many top music schools in the U.S., he chose St. John's at Cambridge because of the "rich tradition of music and unique program of study." Kemper will be focusing on music performance but will also be looking forward to learning about all facets of music including history, composing, and theory. The accelerated program at Cambridge earns a Bachelor's degree in three years and a Master's degree during the fourth year.

Claire has also performed for the National Society of Arts and Letters and has participated in master classes with many internationally renowned instructors. She has participated in Kronberg Adacemy's violin and chamber music sessions, and was invited to attend the 20th anniversary festival in 2013. Claire was the Pittsburgh Concert Society Young Artist Winner in 2015 and received the Anna and Benjamin Perlow scholarship.

The competition for the Blackwood scholarship each year is tough, but years of preparation have given them both

an impressive resume that prepared them for this audition and their continuing studies.



She's chosen to study at Vienna's Konservatorium Wien because they offer a Bachelor's degree in the Arts as well as intense musical performance instruction. "It is situated right in the center of Vienna — probably the most musical city in the world. The professors there are absolutely fantastic and it is a very motivating and inspirational environment," she said. Claire spent the summer in Europe participating in music festivals, master classes and concerts in Vienna, Germany, and London. She was able to strengthen her German and take lessons from renowned instructors as well as immerse herself in the traditional musical culture of Europe.

Applying for the Blackwood Music Scholarship required an audition at Heinz Hall in front of judges from the Pittsburgh Symphony. The recipients were selected on the basis of musical talent, academic performance, recommendations from private and school band teachers, motivation, and a written essay. After the recipients were selected, Kemper, Claire and five other winners performed a recital at the Blackwood Estate in Harrisville, PA, on May 17. Claire played the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, the piece that inspired her to become a professional musician. "You could actually make it your life's work to learn that piece; that is what I aim for," she said. Kemper played the first movement of the Sibelius Violin Concerto, a piece he had been working on for some time.

The Blackwood Theater Organ Society is a not-for-profit organization created to encourage students to pursue instrumental music performance careers. The Society has awarded more than \$246,000 in scholarships to the top high school musicians over the past 15 years. "All of the scholarship winners talk about the profound effects that music has had on their lives and their desire to use their talent in helping others," said Ben Robertson, co-founder of the Blackwood Theater Organ Society. The Blackwood Estate is the home of a rare Wurlitzer theater pipe organ and holds concerts featuring internationally-acclaimed performers each year, with the proceeds going towards the scholarships and other charities. ■

Blackwood Scholarship Winners Michael Fleming, Jacob McAleavey, Keoni Bolding, Claire Edwards, and Kemper Edwards.

