

Music, Friendship, and Improvisation

Alumna Audrey Budington



When Audrey Budington wants to compose, she doesn't use staff paper and a pencil. She picks up her fiddle and improvises. "I'll have a little bit of a melody or rhythm stuck in my head, and I improvise around it," she says. "It feels like less of a process and more of an exploration."

An alumna of the Music School and a versatile multi-genre and multi-instrument musician, Budington is now doing her improvising and exploring at Berklee College of Music, where she received the College's internationally competitive Presidential Scholarship. As she studies and performs in Boston, her Music School experiences have stayed with her, and have kept her expanding her musical horizons and reaching out to collaborate and connect with fellow musicians.

At the Music School, her penchant for tunesmithing found a variety of outlets from soulful solos in Jazz Ensemble to harmonies and backup grooves in Folk Ensemble. She delved into voice lessons, classical violin, and piano. "It totally prepared me for doing things outside of my comfort zone," she says.

Even the first Music School experience that she can recall -- coming to Songweavers rehearsal with her mother -- left its mark, expanding her musical interests as the group sang songs from a plethora of cultures and musical traditions. "Songweavers was super influential," she says. "I got exposed to all kinds of different music."

Meanwhile, she was forging musical friendships. "Being at the Music School I could be friends with teachers and students and the little kids and the grandparents. Everybody comes together through music."

Now at Berklee, she's connecting with a new network of music-lovers. "We all bond," she says. "The city has community too. Especially this winter with all the snow. People were skiing down the streets. I was having snowball fights with people I didn't even know."

And she's finding kindred spirits in her beloved folk music. Budington was featured in the Emerging Artists Showcase at Boston's Celtic Music Festival, and she plays in a Celtic ensemble, whose leader collaborates with other folk musicians that she has met along her musical journey. "The folk world is a total bubble. These are my people," she says.

But Budington is always ready to step outside that bubble, to dive into new things, to improvise. Amid complex music theory classes, a competitive music scene, and simply navigating life in the big city, she remembers the advice of her jazz ensemble coach. "David Tonkin would say, 'If you're going to make mistakes, make them loud,'" she recalls. "That applies to me here at Berklee in more ways than just music. Life is an improvisation."

