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UCLA music major Michael Perry jumps to it

By **Claudia Luther** | March 29, 2012

Even at a place as full of talent as UCLA, it is unusual for students to distinguish themselves in such diverse fields as music and sports, but Michael Perry has done so.

Perry, a music major in violin performance and a member of the field and track team, currently has the highest cumulative grade-point average of any student-athlete at UCLA.

Perry, 20, a sophomore whose longest jump is 23 feet, 6 inches, has the respect of his team, which trains in Drake Stadium.

"Mike is hard-working and focused," track and field coach Anthony Curran said. "Running track and playing music — that's a lot to take on. Obviously, we're proud of him."

On the other side of the campus, Perry is held in high regard by his music professors, who say he is talented and versatile.

"In addition to working hard on the standard works of the violin repertoire, he loves chamber music and orchestra," said music professor Movses Pogossian, who has taught Perry since he was in high school. "He's also an avid and capable improviser, happily participating in Kenny Burrell's jazz combos and writing his own cadenzas."

Michael Dean, chair of the UCLA Department of Music, said it is extraordinary that a music student, who has so many performances, rehearsals and other obligations, is able to find the time to do athletics at all.

"His time-management skills are incredible," Dean said.

How does Perry juggle music, track and classes?

It takes a lot of planning. First of all, he maps out each day so that he knows when he will be practicing the violin,

eating lunch, doing homework or working out. "It keeps me efficient with my time," he said.

His first priority is the violin, which he practices at least four hours a day, usually early in the morning and again in the evening. Classes and track practice take up most of the daytime hours.

Luckily, most track meets are on the weekends, which is when Perry also does most of his homework. Only twice has he had to miss music rehearsals because of a track meet, so his usually strict orchestra conductor has allowed his occasional absence.

Perry said he has always been very physically active, and he'd probably be working out regularly anyway, "so I might as well take the time to be on the track team." Besides, he loves long jumping.

"It's fun to sprint your fastest and then jump as far as possible," he said. "On really good jumps, it almost feels like you're flying for a little bit."

He also likes just hanging out with his teammates. And his participation in track has an added benefit for the music side of him: He keeps in condition to play. "The more athletic you are, the easier it is to play," he said.



Perry, who resides in Altadena, comes from a musical family. Both of his parents are pianists. His father, John, teaches at the Colburn School, a Los Angeles performing arts academy; his mother, Antoinette, teaches at USC and part-time at UCLA; and his twin sister, Maureen, is studying voice at USC. Another sibling, his brother Sean, who attended USC, influenced him to play sports.

Interestingly, the approach to doing both music and sports well has similarities, Perry said. Both require him to clear his mind so that he can zero in on what he is doing.

"But what's different is, when I'm performing music, I try to be as calm as possible to be able to play my best," he said. "But when I'm jumping, I try to be as pumped up as possible."

He would never, for example, listen to classical music before a jump. "I'd listen to rap or hip-hop," he said. "Something with a good beat and a lot of energy."

When he graduates, Perry would like to continue in music, whether it be classical, jazz, tango, with an orchestra or solo. "Right now, I'm just trying to get as good as I can get," he said.

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