



Violinist Jordan Busa Serenades Long Beach's Neighborhoods

By Meghan O'Dell

Two months after COVID-19 hit, violinist Jordan Busa needed to come up with a solution. With zero gigs on the horizon and no end to the pandemic in sight, he posted on his neighborhood Facebook group to gauge interest in a donation-based outdoor concert, where he'd bring the music to your home. That first week, his phone was constantly going off – he was booked a month out and doing 4 or 5 performances around Bixby Knolls every day. Now, he's brought his mini concerts to other areas of Long Beach, L.A., and Orange County.

I had the pleasure of seeing Jordan perform in a friend's backyard a few weekends ago, and I was blown away – especially when I found out that he's only 25 years old. He wore a pineapple-print short-sleeved button-up shirt with jeans and a black mask with the treble clef symbol embroidered on it, and he spoke a little about each piece before playing his beautiful, engrossing 25-minute set. He stuck around for a bit afterward and chatted with the guests before heading off to his next gig.

Jordan started playing violin at age 5; his older cousins played, which inspired his parents to have him start playing. He hated it at first, but started to superficially like it when he realized he was better than the other kids. He didn't start feeling passionate about playing until middle school, when he heard "Chaconne" by Vitali. "When you're a beginner you play very boring songs, and they don't represent the true capacity of what the instrument can produce," Jordan said. "When I heard that song, I realized that the violin can sound really cool, and I wanted to get really good at it."

Jordan grew up in Bixby Knolls and went to Poly High School, and he played in the orchestra all through middle school and high school. He had a photographic memory as a kid, so he could easily memorize pieces. When I started to ask about the years after high school, Jordan shared that he has Tourette syndrome, which is actually one of the main reasons he plays violin.

"When I was growing up with it, no one knew what it was," Jordan said, adding that he was diagnosed in 5th grade but his symptoms started in kindergarten. "It was really hard and other kids made fun of me; I would go home and play my violin because being so focused on playing negates my symptoms." School and homework made him stressed, which worsened his symptoms. "I couldn't get into any colleges I wanted to go to," Jordan said, explaining that a lot of performers network through their universities and get more exposure that way. "I had to claw my way into getting more experience."

His symptoms have slowed down as he gets older: "It used to hold me back so much; I couldn't interact with other people and I was really introverted. Now I'm free to be a normal human being; I had to play catch-up socially."

One of Jordan's goals over the last few years was to have a sustained income. He was getting close, but then the pandemic showed up. With live performances being indefinitely on hold, he needed a way to make a living. On top of that, he owed money to someone very important to him: his former mentor, Helen Hagen, who was a teacher at his elementary school and the leader of the string group he played in. When Jordan graduated, she gifted him with a 100-year-old violin because she believed in him. But in 2017, he lost it when he accidentally drove away with the violin on top of his car. "I went to her crying, and she told me to come pick out another one the next day; it was equal in value and sound," he said. Since he was now an adult, she asked that he pay \$3,000 for it (which is a lot of money for a 22-year-old).

When Jordan found out she had stage 4 cancer, he knew he had to finally pay her back. "Be-



tween the pandemic and wanting to pay her back, I came up with the idea to play in front of people's houses," Jordan explained. "I went into it with no expectations; I didn't feel like I deserved anything, and that any money I got was a gift from the universe." To his surprise, he was able to come up with \$3,000 pretty quickly. "I showed up at her house and she was so happy. She didn't care about the money; she was just glad to see me working," Jordan said. Helen was recently declared cancer free: "I'd like to think that the violin healed her."

Jordan feels very fortunate to have discovered this way to perform: "This is not the normal market for musicians, but I put up an offer that's hard to refuse." He doesn't have to wear a restrictive tux and can wear soft, comfortable clothes (which is helpful for his symptoms), and it's so much more intimate and emotional. "I can see people's faces and that it means something to them," Jordan says. "Usually you're not the main focus; you're hired to play an event that's about something else. But now I'm not an ant in a bigger army; it's just me, and I get more exposure."

People have a really good reason for hiring him these days, too. "Everyone has their story of why they need this music. For one person, it was their parents' 50th anniversary and they couldn't celebrate the way they wanted to, so they hired me. There were a few instances where people hired me for their parents because they knew it would be their last birthday." The fact that he can come to people's homes makes a huge difference, Jordan says. "I can bring joy to people who actually need it."

Contact Jordan through Instagram (@fiddleofflowers) or by texting him at 562-896-9040.

Meghan O'Dell has been a Long Beach resident for 16 years. She loves reading, seeing live music, and watching too many shows, and she lives with her husband and their Calico cat in the Bluff Heights neighborhood.