

# Culture Freak: How a violinist took a cue from Usain Bolt



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9 p.m. EDT March 12, 2015

*Indy's occasional cultural dish explores arts artifacts like iconic sports photography and plunges into the depths of Barbra Streisand's basement mall.*

Welcome to Culture Freak, an occasional digest of all things arts and culture in Indy.

It's your one-stop-shop for all the arts happenings — big to small, high to low — that make this vibrant city what it is.

I'm Wei, a jazz trumpeter, screenwriter and erstwhile poet who happens to be the Star's dedicated arts enthusiast. I hope a refreshing take on the local scene will get you excited about the arts — because not enough people are.

From what you missed to what's on the horizon, here are five things to keep you in the know. Up ahead: Why Lois Lowry writes for kids, a violin fashionista who eats bananas because of Usain Bolt and the mall inside Barbra Streisand's basement.



Soyoung Yoon, a South Korean violinist based in Switzerland, is a silver medalist from the 2010 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. She performed March 10 at the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana History Center. (Photo: Photo provided by the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis)

## **Soyoung Yoon eats a lot of bananas**

There's a superstition among South Korean musicians that bananas make you "slippery" and therefore play sloppily on stage. Violinist Soyoung Yoon says bullocks.

Inspired by Jamaican Sprinter's Usain Bolt's 13-a-day banana diet, Yoon loads up on bananas whenever she gets nervous before a competition or concert, she told me from her host family's Broad Ripple home.

All that natural fruit sugar worked charms for Yoon, a silver medalist from the 2010 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, when she performed a rousing set — featuring Giuseppe Tartini's infamously difficult "Devil's Trill Sonata" — Tuesday at the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana History Center as part of the competition's Laureate Series.

## **Lois Lowry receives heartbreaking, inspiring email from gay teen**

One day a 16-year-old boy named Noah read "The Giver" and decided to keep on living.

He's a closeted gay teen living in the South, and his father's a pastor. But "The Giver," Lois Lowry's seminal dystopian fable about a boy learning to be human in a black and white world, celebrated nonconformity in the face of societal pressure.

Last December, Noah introduced himself to Lowry, via email. It broke the 77-year-old author's heart. "I haven't come out for fear of really everything," he told her. "My parents want me to be something I don't want to be. They want that sameness of them."

Noah said he is "confused, and it gets me down a lot and most of the time I sleep the pain away."

But "The Giver" gave him hope. "I want to explore," he said. "I don't want to be just another product of society. I don't want the world to be black and white but to be colorful."

Lowry, who spoke at Butler University's Clowes Memorial Hall on March 4, wrote back. He responded.

She said stories like this are the reason she writes young adult literature. "Because writing for kids this age is addressing people who will become what they will be," she told the filled auditorium. "It's very important, and I take it very seriously."



NEA Chairwoman Jane Chu visited Indianapolis on March 6 and 7. Chu studied at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. *(Photo: Provided by Strauss Peyton Studios)*

### **The nation's arts advocate-in-chief has Southern charm**

"Do you cut the grass or mow the lawn?" Jane Chu asked me Friday [during a visit to the Indianapolis Art Center](#). The answer is cut the grass, of course, just as it's "order a Coke" and "put your bookbag up." That's because the 56-year-old, until her appointment eight months ago by President Barack Obama to chair the National Endowment of the Arts, has always been a Southern gal.

Chu, who speaks with a Southern twang, was born in Shawnee, Okla., to Chinese immigrants and grew up in Arkansas. (She got serious about piano after her father, a college professor, died of cancer when she was 9).

Her most recent gig was as president and CEO of the stately, double-domed Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Mo. In fact, the furthest point north Chu has really lived is Indianapolis, where she received a doctorate from Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

"Always nice to meet another Asian from the South," this South Carolinian said to Chu, to which she replied, "Yeah, because there's like three of us!"

Entertainer Barbra Streisand's Malibu home has a basement shopping mall. A new play at the Phoenix Theatre, "Buyer and Cellar," takes place in the mall and stars its fictional sole employee. *(Photo: Firooz Zahedi)*

## **Venture into Barbra Streisand's basement mall**

Barbra Streisand has a personal shopping mall in her basement. Open up her 2010 coffee table book "My Passion for Design," and you'll see that the barn in her Malibu home has an underground streetscape complete with little "shoppes."

The Phoenix Theatre's doing a one-man show, "[Buyer and Cellar](#)," written by Jonathan Tolins and starring Scot Greenwell, which answers the pressing question, "What if I worked at that mall?"

No, the real Babs herself won't be making a cameo appearance — at least not that I know of. The show runs through April 5.

## **"What I Learned in Paris" brings color to the stage**

Like "A Raisin in the Sun," "[What I Learned in Paris](#)" tells of macro racial battles through themicro struggles of a black family — but with an orange twist.

Pearl Cleage's play is set to the backdrop of Maynard Jackson's 1973 election in Georgia, in which he became the first African-American mayor of a major U.S. city. But its focus is Evie Madison, who throws scandal and alcohol into the mix, and whose style evokes the alluring purples and greens of 1970s lounge culture.

The play runs March 17 to April 12 at the Indiana Repertory Theatre.

*Wei-Huan Chen is always searching for the unusual, surprising and human stories of Indy's cultural scene. He can be reached at (317) 444-6249 or on Twitter at @weihuanchen.*