

Holy Names Music Center gets new executive directors

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Archie Chen and Rhona Gouldson-Chen are the new executive directors of the Holy Names Music Center. (Courtesy)

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Music is something that runs in the veins of both Rhona Gouldson-Chen and Archie Chen, the new executive directors of Holy Names Music Center. Both are seasoned musicians, one from Spokane and the other from Dublin.

Chen's mother entertained crowds in Taiwan in the '70s before coming to Spokane. Gouldson-Chen, like many Irish families growing up, had a piano in her house that helped her discover early on her passion for piano, while her brothers learned the violin.

Both grew up playing instruments within their household, with Chen's hosting an organ, rather than piano. Both play multiple instruments. Gouldson-Chen learned the classical Irish harp growing up, while Chen bounced around several brass instruments as he passed through Mead High School.

Chen graduated from Mead in 1995, a dual member of its marching and jazz band programs. He grew up in Spokane, as his family moved out of Taiwan in the '70s to come to America.

"Music is a bridge to connect people," Chen said, citing music for how he connected with others in Mead as a first-generation immigrant.

On the other side of the globe from one another, both felt a calling for music in their lives as they passed through high school. Chen went to the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, earning his master's degree there, while Gouldson-Chen studied piano at Trinity College in Ireland. The bridge of music connected both of them, as Chen was in Europe to further his piano studies when he met his future wife at the Piano Academy of Ireland, which she opened.

They married shortly after meeting, a relationship that has held up for 16 years. They share two children, who hold a dual citizenship between Ireland and the United States. While they both ran the Piano Academy in Ireland, they frequented Spokane to play their own performances.

It was family that drove the Chens to stay in Spokane, as their kids wanted to live in the U.S., and Chen's mother, still living in Spokane, brought him back. With their return, both took up their role as co-executive directors of the Holy Names Music Center. Neither of them have left their piano school, either – separated by 4,500 miles, both run the Piano Academy of Ireland in Dublin.

"We're looking to nurture the passion for music," Gouldson-Chen said of her goals with the Holy Names Music Center. Their mix of passion and entrepreneurial skills is what has driven the Chens throughout their careers, and what's brought them to Holy Names. The first performance under their leadership occurred on Labor Day – with their next performance scheduled Friday.

Saturday starting at 2 p.m. will be a "musician tour of the world," Gouldson-Chen said. Guests will get to see and play instruments from around the world. Those who visit all musical stations will be eligible for a raffle hosted by Holy Names Music Center.

The event will conclude with a performance from their faculty of 35, which will include performances by both co-executive directors.