Youth Artist Spotlight

Mauricio Valenzuela

Join us as we dive into our community's talented youth! *With a new airing schedule, you have more opportunities to hear our latest interview.* ***Tune in to KCME every Thursday at 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.!***



Meet Mauricio Valenzuela, a student at the Fountain Valley School of Colorado, who plays a wide variety of instruments and music. *While you can read his full interview right now, catch part one of the feature on air this December!*

Part 1: *Getting to Know the Artist*

Tell us a little about yourself. *Where do you go to school right now, and what are you studying or involved in musically? We'd love to hear about your background and how music fits into your life.*

I attend Fountain Valley School of Colorado, where I'm involved in a variety of musical activities. I study both orchestral and jazz music, as well as music theory, and I spend a lot of my time composing and producing my own music. I've been involved with it for most of my life, and at this point, it has become such an important part of who I am that I can't really imagine myself without it. I hope to study music in the future and continue making it a central part of what I do.

What instrument do you play and how did you get started? *How old were you when you first began learning music? What made you choose your instrument or decide to sing?*

I play several instruments, including piano, bass, guitar, and alto saxophone, largely because I enjoy writing and

arranging music. However, my main focus lies in percussion, which makes up over 100 of the instruments I play. My mom was a big part of getting me started because she noticed how much music meant to me when I was very young and encouraged me to pursue it. In fact, before I could even really talk, I would try to sing along with Steven Tyler whenever Aerosmith was playing on the television, so music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember.

Do you remember a moment when music really became exciting or meaningful for you? *Maybe it was a concert you heard, a piece you performed, or a teacher who inspired you.*

One moment that really changed my relationship with music happened this past summer while I was in Peru. I wrote a song there that expressed something very meaningful to me that I had never really been able to put into music before. Being able to communicate those feelings through music made me realize just how powerful it could be as a form of expression. That experience was one of the moments when I truly knew that I couldn't see myself doing anything other than music for the rest of my life.

Part 2: *Your Musical Journey*

Who has helped, inspired, or influenced you the most in music so far? *This could be a teacher, band director, mentor, or a musician you admire.*

My teacher, Mr. Aavalajn Wiggins, has been one of the biggest influences on me as a musician. He has taught me that wasting talent can be as simple as choosing not to make the most of it, and that having the ability means very little without the work to develop it. He has also taught me that consistency is one of the most important parts of getting something done well. Most importantly, he has shown me that when you truly love something, you have to persevere and keep working at it, even when it becomes difficult. Additionally, Mr. Nicholson, my conductor at the Youth Symphony, has inspired me to become a responsible and professional musician. He often reminds me that "the performance begins when you step out of your car, and it ends when you step back in." He has taught me to believe in myself and pursue my talents, and that "patience is key" to developing my craft.

What ensembles or groups do you play or sing with? *Tell us about your jazz band, combo, school groups, or any other ensembles you play with and what you enjoy about them.*

I've been a member of my school's jazz band throughout my entire high school career, and I've been part of the Colorado Springs Youth Symphony Association since seventh grade, making this my

sixth year with the organization. Through the Youth Symphony, I've had the opportunity to participate in international tours to Australia in 2024 and Japan in 2026, both of which were life-changing experiences. I'm also in my second year with the CSYSA Ascent Big Band, and last year I had the opportunity to perform with the group at the UNC Greeley Jazz Festival, where I got to see some of the best jazz musicians in Colorado performing in one place. This past summer, while on an exchange in South America, I was invited to play as a guest-performer with the Peruvian rock band Abahna Haze at several different venues, which gave me an entirely different perspective on performing and collaborating with other musicians on the international stage.

What was one of your favorite or most memorable musical experiences so far? *Describe a concert, recital, or musical experience that stands out to you.*

One of my most memorable musical experiences was performing at the Sydney Opera House during my Youth Symphony tour in Australia. It was one of the most incredible places I have ever had the privilege to perform in, and stepping onto that stage was something I'll never forget. The acoustics were especially amazing because I could hear each individual musician so clearly. Hearing the orchestra come together in that room for the first time was a truly unforgettable experience.

Part 3: *Inspiration & Looking Ahead*

Are there any composers, performers, or pieces you especially enjoy? *What music are you listening to or practicing lately?*

Lately, I've been listening to a wide range of music, including Bill Evans, León Larregui, and Masayoshi Takanaka. I've been especially interested in Takanaka's music because of the way he blends Japanese musical influences with jazz, rock, and other Western traditions, which is something I explored in greater depth through a research paper I recently wrote. I really enjoy discovering connections between different musical traditions and seeing how musicians can take influences from completely different places and create something new. On drums, I've also been practicing a lot of Roy Haynes, whose playing has been a major inspiration for me as I continue developing my own style.

What do you like to do when you're not making music? *How do these other activities influence your creativity, balance, or perspective as a musician?*

Outside of music, I'm very involved in leadership at my school. I'm the president of Alianza Latina-Hispana, a

leader in our Student Cultural Organization, and a member of the Community Council. These experiences have helped me become more comfortable speaking up and contributing my ideas when I work with groups or bands. They have also taught me better time management and how to balance different responsibilities. Most importantly, working with people who have different ideas and perspectives has helped me become a more thoughtful collaborator, which directly carries over into the way I work with other musicians.

How do you see music being part of your future? *Do you hope to keep performing, study music further, or simply continue playing for fun?*

My ultimate goal is to build a career in music. I'm especially interested in performing jazz and orchestral music on drums and percussion, but I also really enjoy music production and songwriting. I've already had the opportunity to help produce a song called "Lovely Lady," which is available on Spotify, and I would love to continue exploring that side of music as well. I'm currently going through the college search and preparing my auditions and applications, so for now I'm focused on working hard and building toward a future where music can continue to be my way of living.



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