

Chinese violist and composer **Kun Yan** (颜坤) is an artist whose path to music was anything but conventional. Born in Mianyang, Sichuan, he began studying the violin at the age of thirteen, initially pursuing music alongside a more traditional academic path. He later earned a degree in Finance from Sun Yat-sen University and worked as a Senior Auditor at Ernst & Young in Guangzhou before ultimately leaving the corporate world to devote himself fully to classical music.

Kun earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Viola Performance and Literature at **University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign**, where he studies with Liz Freivogel and serves as a Research Assistant in the Public Engagement Department. He previously received his Master’s degree in Viola and Orchestral Studies from **Tianjin Juilliard School**, studying with Honggang Li. In addition to performance studies, he pursued a cognate in **composition**, studying with Reynold Tharp, Kerry Hagan, and Niccolò Athens. In 2026, he composed and published the three-movement viola sonata *Yin and Yang*, and presented two lecture recitals exploring original Chinese music–inspired composition alongside Hindemith’s *Der Schwanendreher*.

Alongside his performance career, Kun has maintained strong involvement in music administration. At Tianjin Juilliard, he served on the Graduate Student Advisory Council and was a committee member of the inaugural student-led festival Ensemble Plus. At Illinois, he works on concert and recital program production supporting the School’s performance presentation and public engagement activities. He has also participated in cross-cultural artistic events, including serving as a panelist alongside Yo-Yo Ma and Yu Long at the Youth Music Culture Guangdong Festival in 2021.

As an educator, Kun has worked with students across a wide range of ages and backgrounds. He served as a Music Theory Coach and Chamber & Ensemble Mentor in the Pre-College Division at Tianjin Juilliard, and was a Teaching Assistant at the Brevard Music Festival in 2024. His teaching experience also includes private instruction, studio classes, viola sectionals, chamber music instruction, and interdisciplinary educational programs both in China and the United States.

Chamber music remains central to Kun’s artistic identity. Under the mentorship of the Jupiter Quartet and Shanghai Quartet, he has performed an extensive repertoire spanning classical masterworks and contemporary works. His chamber activities also include premieres and interdisciplinary collaborations. He has led and participated in numerous outreach performances in schools, orphanages, retirement homes, and local communities, often contributing original arrangements and collaborative programming.

An active orchestral musician, Kun has frequently served as principal violist with ensembles including the Tianjin Juilliard Orchestra, University of Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Brevard Music Center Orchestra and Sinfonia, Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra, and Sun Yat-sen University Symphony Orchestra, where he also served as concertmaster and assistant conductor. He has performed with professional ensembles including the Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia da Camera, Suzhou Symphony Orchestra, Macao Orchestra, and Nanchang Symphony Orchestra. Throughout these experiences, he has collaborated with internationally renowned artists and conductors including Leonard Slatkin, Keith Lockhart, Mei-Ann Chen, JoAnn Falletta, Yu Long, Teddy Abrams, Taichi Fukumura, Yuja Wang, Wynton Marsalis, Stella Chen, and Masumi Per

Rostad.

Today, Kun's artistic work centers on the intersection of viola performance, composition, chamber music, and cultural storytelling, with a particular interest in connecting Chinese folk influences with contemporary classical language.