

By Alexandra Evans

Blythe Schulte stood up and walked across the blue linoleum carpet to the center of the classroom, feeling like she was moving in slow motion. Her music teacher called on her to perform an act.

Schulte, 5, had never sang in front of anyone, but she decided against a solo cheerleading act or an original poem she was not content with.

Once in the center of the room, Schulte began singing “At the Gates of Heaven,” a children’s Spanish folk song. Her classmates, their parents, her parents, and her music teacher watched, astonished.

“I swear, when I was done [singing], you could hear a pin drop,” Schulte, now 21, said. “I know I was really young in that memory, but I remember it.”

Schulte is a senior at Berklee College of Music and the lead singer of a 16-piece, Boston-based band, which she brought together. She pays tribute to her multicultural background through her music—original tunes and covers of other artists—and her performance style.

Schulte was born in Los Angeles, Calif. to a first-generation Chinese-American mother and a Caucasian father from Ohio. She is of Chinese, French, German, British, Irish, Scandinavian, and Korean descent.

Having a mixed racial background has helped Schulte embrace several facets of life which are considered “different,” including music genres.

“I’m definitely very, very American, but... I have, like, 7 different ethnicities and I don’t act like any of them,” she said. “Hashtag ‘mixed.’”

Schulte began composing her own tunes a few years after beginning voice lessons at age 5, which are primarily jazz and blues-influenced. She also integrates classical, musical theatre, pop/rock, Bebop assets into her writing.

Schulte enrolled at Berklee in the fall of 2015 and began performing her original tunes her sophomore year. Recently, she has composed and performed tracks in Mandarin Chinese, including her new song “Yearning.”

Guitarist Colin Jenkins became more exposed to jazz music and multiculturalism upon joining Schulte’s band in 2018.

“She’s branched out from her Mandarin background and the music she grew up with, which is ultimately based in jazz, pop and gospel,” Jenkins said. “But she traces it back to her Chinese roots, her parents and beyond. I look at it with admiration and respect.”

Schulte is a second-generation Chinese-American on her mother’s side; her maternal grandparents immigrated from China to Southern California as teenagers.

“I love the fact that I’m not fluent in Mandarin Chinese, but I can write a 50s pop song in Mandarin Chinese... I just try to appreciate things that are different from me,” she said.

Schulte is also synesthetic; visual stimulations activate a “secondary sense” when she looks at objects. She can see different colors in another person’s clothing, passing cars, or written music, to name a few.

“I’ll know [words are] printed in black ink, although I’ll see when is orange, when is blue and when is pink, for every letter,” she said. “It’ll switch up all the time, so that’s what makes music really interesting for me.”

Another feature of Schulte’s performances is her custom-made stuffed animals, which she calls “plushies.” Drawing on past life hardships, she displays them on stage to “soften” societal taboos—“things that people should not bring up in public,” she said.

Alex Yen, a recent Berklee graduate, said Schulte’s style has “a sense of childish cuteness.”

“She’s not afraid to be bold, but she’s also very approachable and friendly once you get to know her,” Yen said.

Schulte will graduate from Berklee in the spring of 2019 with a Bachelor of Music in Professional Music with concentrations in songwriting and performance, as well as a minor in entrepreneurship.

“I definitely don’t have aspirations to become, like, the next Lady Gaga,” she said. “Whether [people] know who I am or not is unimportant to me, as long as I am able to touch their lives [with my music] in some way.”