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7. NATHANIEL AYERS PLAYS HIS MUSIC

For Nathaniel Ayers, his love of music originated with his own desire and drive, a double bass and great teachers. At age 12, Nathaniel Ayers began lessons on the double bass, the largest and lowest-pitched stringed instrument (played with a bow) in modern symphony orchestras. His goal was to become a bassist in a world-class orchestra. This image—depicting a double bass, from its front and side—has a piezo pickup.

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When Nathaniel performs his street music, in the tunnel at 2nd and Hill, people (like Steve Lopez) sometimes stop to listen. But when he performs with his friends from the LA Philharmonic, things really “get good.” Take, for example, his duet with pianist [Joanne Pearce-Martin](#).

Not sure, for some reason (or no reason), that a trumpet solo would work with piano accompaniment, Ayers nonetheless gives it a try. Playing an instrument for which he'd had no lessons, and first tackled not long before his duet with Joanne, he turns in a good performance. Then he switches to the cello, finds his groove and [produces wonderful music](#).

The same is true with the violin. [Robert Gupta](#), a child prodigy who was hired to play violin with the LA Phil at the young [age of nineteen](#), has taken a special interest in Nathaniel. Sometimes, when Nathaniel plays his violin on the street across from Disney Hall, Robert joins him. They play together.

Willing to [help his friend improve](#), Gupta worked-through his own share of torment when other students didn't understand his passion for classical music. At fourteen, he left school to study with a private tutor and graduated before his classmates. Masters in hand, at nineteen, he could have chosen a career in science but wanted to perform with a world-class orchestra. He is patient with Nathaniel, and his efforts to help have been extremely meaningful.

Life goes on for Nathaniel. He finally convinced himself, through [the help of his friends](#), to live in an apartment near skid-row. He couldn't see how he could leave Beethoven, in Pershing Square, until Peter Snyder gave him a small Beethoven statue which he could keep in his own room. When he said he'd miss the effects of the 2nd Street Tunnel, Snyder suggested that his new room was like a tunnel—it was just a bit quieter.

And so ... Nathaniel has made wonderful progress—with his music, [with his sisters](#), with his friends—but [the illness](#) is still there. Sometimes his disease-caused rage erupts [against Lopez](#), just like it did against his mother and sisters. Jennifer tells us:

It was very difficult for my mother, because he would curse her out, call her names, threaten her. When we went to visit her in the nursing home on her birthday, she looked at me and said, 'I miss Tony.' He was her pride and joy, and she did everything she possibly could to help him.

Lopez has done everything he could possibly do to help, as well—but sometimes Ayers doesn't want the help. Sometimes he just wants to be left alone. Setting out to change Nathaniel, Steve is the one most changed by their friendship. And as their [interview with Morley Safer](#) demonstrates, Lopez has really learned the meaning of Camus' words:

*Just walk beside me
and be my friend.*

And so he has ... and so they are.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the years since his book was published (and the movie, "The Soloist" was released), Steve Lopez continues to be supportive of his friend, Nathaniel Ayers. [This article](#), from the fall of 2014, provides an

update.

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Media Stream



Nathaniel Ayers - With Robert Gupta and Steve Lopez
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