

Carmel Valley lad plays and then he plays some more

Pianist, prodigy and composer is still an average boy.

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Don't call 13-year-old Carmel Valley resident Chase Morrin – gasp, gasp – a prodigy.

The incoming Canyon Crest Academy freshman will leave that to others such as “Steinway and Sons Boston Piano Publication,” which called Chase a “child genius.”

“Mozart was called a prodigy,” Chase said. “It's not that I'm a prodigy, I work hard and love it.”

Knowledgeable about the great composers, Chase added, “Mozart was introduced to music by his father at a very early age, and he only became famous only after 130 years.”

Chase counted Beethoven, Chopin and Bach among his favorite classical composers.

Chase started teaching himself piano at the age of eight, when his parents presented him with a keyboard for Christmas. As with most every mother, Cindy Morrin, an educational counselor at Cuyamaca College, wanted her son to be literate in music.

If only she could imagine...

Five years later, in June of this year, Chase was honored at The Lincoln Center in New York City. He was the youngest of eight recipients, and youngest ever, to receive the national ASCAP – American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers – Young Jazz Composer Award.

The winning composition, three minutes, 36 seconds long, is named “Free Fall” and inspired by “Well-Tempered Clavier in C Minor” by Bach.

Speaking of the Big Apple, New York City, Chase said, “It's a big city, that's for sure.” He saw the landmarks, and at the awards ceremony noticed the great Tony Bennett was sitting in the audience.

With more than 20 compositions completed, Chase, and his family, now remember the beginning, for about a year, he was begging for piano lessons. He learned to read music through his elementary school band, playing saxophone, and participating in choirs.



Svetlana Pikous was Chase's first piano teacher. Now, he studies with Ken Ard, who is a classically trained musician.

"He often tells me that if Bach was composing today, he would be a jazz musician," said Chase, who continued, "Ken's been pushing me to play classical music. It's a foundation."

Chase played his grandma's old stand-up piano for years. Then, his parents decided to go all the way and bought a Steinway-designed, six-foot-four-inch Boston grand piano.

Of course, Chase had to earn straight A's for it, although perhaps his supportive parents would have done it anyway.

Along with the grand piano downstairs, the Morrin home has a beginner drum set, very old saxophone – "It's my cousin's and I need to return it sometime," Chase said – a trumpet from "Costco," and last year's Christmas present, a guitar and clarinet that younger brother Cody is learning to play.

"I want to compose a lot – exciting, emotional music – and to get my music out in the world," Chase said. He is thinking of compositions for big bands and orchestras.

Chase has a feel for different instruments in his compositions. Even though his composition, "Nicaragua High," is only played on the piano, one can feel the presence of the trumpet.

Together with friends, Alex Knieb (saxophone), Elias Newman (drummer) and Sharad Vikram (drummer), Chase is forming a band, named ACE.

Chase also teaches piano to youngsters in the neighborhood. But he uses some unique teaching methods. He writes poems, enjoys soccer and fencing, and participates in science and math competitions.

But don't get scared. Chase has read the last of the Harry Potter books. Just as the millions of teenagers around the world, he set his clock, got up at 1 a.m. on Saturday, July 21, and rushed his parents to take him to the neighborhood "Barnes and Noble" bookstore to buy the book.

And just as everyone, Chase read "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows" during the day with one slight difference. He had a big solo concert coming that night.

"I don't practice before a concert," Chase said, "just warm up for a half hour."

The free concert at Greene Music Concert Hall on Miramar Road was a success. Between donations and CD purchases, it raised \$500 for the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation, said Cindy Morrin, Chase's mother.

Chase has a lot of friends and they helped by being ushers at his fund-raising concert. Later, they all decided to miss the promised movie and popcorn, and stayed for a sleepover at Chase's house. They wanted to so they could finish reading the last chapter of the Harry Potter saga together.

Chase performs at Carmel Valley Library at 7 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 29. It's the season opener of the free Family Music Night Program. For more information about Chase visit www.cuyamaca.edu/cindymorrin/ChaseMorrin.htm