

Torrey Hills piano prodigy wins prestigious award

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“Be prepared to receive something special,” read the fortune cookie.

But Carmel Valley Middle School student Chase Morrin didn’t know it would be so special. He and a friend were working on their Science Olympiad projects after a Chinese lunch when the letter came.

The envelope said it was from ASCAP — the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. Inside was a check for \$750 and a note saying that the budding 13-year-old pianist won a Young Jazz Composers Award.

“I was like ‘no way,’” Chase says. The composition that won, a jazz romp Chase wrote called “Free Fall,” isn’t like anything he’s ever written since starting to teach himself the piano at age 8.

“I got my idea off Bach,” Chase says. “I tried it out, it’s kind of cool, having a bunch of different melodies running at the same time.”

It was his teacher’s idea to enter the contest with that piece, which is so unusual that his mother, Cindy, says she didn’t particularly love it.

“It’s a lot more complicated than my other pieces and stuff and it took a long time to notate,” Chase says. “With three melodies running at the same time it’s kind of hard to play it with two hands. You have to make sure the notes are kind of close together.”

In addition to acquiring the prestige and money of the award, Chase will travel to New York City in June for a special honors ceremony, before rushing back home for eighth grade promotion.

He and his family are now looking at high schools for next year. Chase’s teacher is encouraging him to attend a performing arts school where he could concentrate on piano.

“The problem is, he loves piano and he loves to compose, and there’s just not enough time when you’re in honors classes,” Cindy says. “Even in middle school, when you’re in honors classes, he’s got a good two hours a night of homework.”

The workload — plus a heavy schedule of extracurriculars such as Science Olympiad and fencing — limits Chase’s playing and composing time to about an hour per day during the school week. But he gets in a couple hours per day during the weekends, and somehow finds the time to teach nine students, while taking his own private lessons.

It’s often during the time Chase spends practicing the classical pieces he’s learning for his teacher that he breaks into creative improvisation.

“All of a sudden he just jumps into another thing,” Cindy says. “I pushed him to write all his compositions down.”

To hear Chase play with Channel 8, visit: http://www.cbs8.com/features/larry_himmel/story.php?id=82055

