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Jupiter piano prodigy takes it 'From the Top'

By **MELISSA E. HOLSMAN**
melissa.holsman@scripps.com
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JUPITER — Watching Taylor Tyson play the piano, her classically trained mind pushing her delicate fingers faster and faster, is breathtaking.

It's as if her 12-year-old soul — through a disciplined blur of black and white keys — is connecting directly with the concert masters who composed the pieces she loves: Chopin, Mendelssohn, Moszkowski and Rachmaninoff.

But to talk with Taylor — who is called a "piano prodigy" about as often as the sun rises — is to discover an incredibly normal kid who happens to possess several spectacular talents that set her apart.

"It kind of makes me blush and feel shy because people think I'm a prodigy," said Taylor, a slender girl with long ash-brown hair and a huge smile. "I think I can play the piano well, but I'm just like a regular kid — I go to school, I have friends, I do regular stuff."

Her extraordinary piano talent will be center stage at 8 p.m. Friday at the Sunrise Theatre in downtown Fort Pierce.

That's when WQCS 88.9 will host a recording of the National Public Radio show "From the Top," a popular classical student program hosted by concert pianist Christopher O'Riley. It introduces students between 8 and 18 years old who study classical music around the country.

"From the Top" is broadcast by WQCS on Sundays at 2 p.m. and is carried by about 250 other public radio stations.

An academic whiz kid and award-winning pianist who began playing at age 4, Taylor knows this may be the start of something big.

"It's going to be really cool listening to myself on the radio," she said. "But sometimes it's weird to listen to myself — sometimes I don't like to watch myself play, so this will be interesting."

Along with playing three hours each day after school, Taylor is tutored by Dr. Roberta Rust, a renowned pianist and music professor at the Lynn Conservatory Preparatory Division, at Lynn University, in Boca Raton.

Taylor was selected for "From the Top" after being nominated by her principal at the Weiss School for the Gifted in Palm Beach Gardens.

"Piano definitely taught me a lot of discipline," she said. "You have to try to do your best at the time you're doing it, and you really have to try and feel the music and let it become a part of you, so then it will sound that much better."

And one day she wants to compose her own music, but so far, she's found that a "huge challenge."

"I feel like I really can play the pieces that other people have written, like composers from a really long time ago," she said. "I feel like I have to try to portray and perfect those types of music first before I can go on to compose my own because when I learn a piece, I learn what the piece really means."

"So maybe in the future... I'll have something to write about, an experience I can relate to the music," she added.

One thing that hasn't changed is her desire to play at New York City's Carnegie Hall. She had once hoped to reach that goal by age 14, but she's upped it to 16.

"I still definitely want to play there," she said.

Last year, Taylor fulfilled another hard-earned dream when she was crowned winner of the International Cinderella Miss in her division, ages 10 to 13, after competing against 70 other girls in Las Vegas.

She has already won several dazzling crowns during her years of competing in the International Cinderella Scholarship Pageant, and



JULIO CORTEZ
julio.cortez@scripps.com

Taylor Tyson, 12, is reflected in her piano at her home in Jupiter on Thursday. She will perform for the National Public Radio show "From The Top" this month.

 **Taylor Tyson: Piano Prodigy**

her successes may one day land her in the ultimate Cinderella contest: The Miss America Pageant.

Along with a rhinestone-studded crown, she has also received the royal-blue Cinderella robe that weighs nearly 20 pounds.

"That's the only thing I don't get to keep," she said. "I have to pass that on. "

When not playing piano, Taylor shops at the mall, has sleepovers and loves the Grammy-nominated rock band The Killers, led by Brandon Flowers.

"I think they are the best ever," she said with a broad grin.

And no, boys aren't in the picture, yet.

"My mom says boys are a distraction," she mimicked, as if she has heard it a million times.

Meanwhile, her parents, Frank and Staci Tyson, called Friday's concert a "watershed" for Taylor's career.

"Taylor is a national caliber pianist, and this will set her on her way," Frank said. "Yep, she can hang with the best of them."

If you're at the Sunrise Friday night, you'll hear exactly what he means.

TAYLOR TYSON

- Daughter of Frank and Staci Tyson, of Jupiter
- 2004: Winner of Nicholas Green Award for State of Florida from the National Association of Gifted Children
- 2005-06: Two-time Gold Medal winner at Florida State Championship for Taekwondo
- 2006: Winner of the International Cinderella Miss in her division, ages 10 to 13. A past winner in several of the 31-year-old pageant contests, this marked Taylor's first appearance in this division, where she competed in Las Vegas against 70 girls. As part of the competition, she played Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude" on the piano.

"FROM THE TOP"

- WQCS 88.9 is hosting National Public Radio's popular classical student program "From the Top" at Fort Pierce's Sunrise Theatre on March 16.
- Hosted by critically acclaimed concert pianist Christopher O'Riley, the NPR radio program will be recorded at the Sunrise Theatre and scheduled for national broadcast at a later date.
- Tickets: \$35 for adults, \$20 for students 18 years and younger. For information, call (772) 461-4884 or go to www.sunrisetheatre.com.

Source: WQCS 88.9

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