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## O'Riley showcases young musicians on NPR, PBS programs

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Christopher O'Riley might not be a household name like "American Idol" judge Simon Cowell.

But the Evanston native and concert pianist can recognize talent – particularly in youth. This month, his show, "From the Top: Live from Carnegie Hall," premiered on PBS following a successful run on National Public Radio.

The show highlights the talents of young musicians ages 8 to 18.

The leap from radio to TV was not a hard one to make, O'Riley said.

"The kids we have on the show are really wonderful performers," O'Riley said. "Just flipping channels on a radio, one gets the impression that they are hearing a great performance, but they are not really aware that there is a 14-year-old playing the pieces."

When O'Riley started hosting the radio show eight years ago, he set out to bring more attention to the talents of young musicians.

"Young musicians were not really getting the kind of attention as say high school athletes," O'Riley said. "It was the idea that one could kill two birds with one stone. You could actually get the attention where it was sorely needed, and the same time, give uninitiated listeners of classical music a new way of getting to know their performers."

Like "American Idol," "From the Top" attempts to present the musicians as more than just performers.

"The idea is, that you want to have the possibility of getting to know the performers as people," O'Riley said.

The "From the Top" radio show continues on the air, with 20 new shows being made a year.

O'Riley admitted he has to be more aware of what he is doing now that he is not just a voice on the radio.

"You want to pay attention to things like whether you are talking with your hands too much," O'Riley said. "Doing the first TV show was like when I did my first radio show, when I had to think a couple of moves ahead. It's something that luckily, I think I took to fairly well."

He is not surprised there are so many young talented musicians. The well-respected Chicago Children's Choir will be featured on the TV show in an episode set to air June 23.

"Although a lot is made about the major music centers in the country as far as training of young musicians, I think Chicago is prominent among them," O'Riley said. "There are lots of opportunities in the Chicagoland area and New York and Philadelphia."

He credits his upbringing in the Chicago area for giving him the musical background he needed to become a professional musician.

"I had access to piano lessons at the Catholic school where I went in Evanston from the age of 4," O'Riley said. "It was a very big impression on me as a youngster to be in that kind of environment and also to be in the kind of environment where you were constantly surrounded by great cultural programming."

This is a busy month for O'Riley. His CD, "Second Grace: The Music of Nick Drake" was released on April 10. On past CDs, O'Riley has interpreted the music of Radiohead and the late Elliott Smith.

Through the CDs, O'Riley is carving out new audiences.

"I know I have been very responsible for introducing a lot of classical music lovers to Radiohead," O'Riley said. "There is sophistication in Radiohead that appeals to classical listeners. It's been sort of a natural flow, back and forth."

# COMMENTS

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