

MUSIC HAS A BIG PLACE IN THIS 13-YEAR-OLD'S LIFE – PATTON HUTCHENS COMPOSES MUSIC FOR PIANO TEACHER SAYS HIS TALENT IS EXCEPTIONAL.

The Charlotte Observer, (NC) – Sunday, December 28, 2008

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Patton Hutchens is a typical 13-year-old boy: Busy with his eighth-grade classes at Charlotte Country Day School, he juggles wrestling, time with his friends, homework and chores around his home in the Montibello subdivision in SouthPark.

Not so typical for boys his age, however, are his special musical interests and abilities. His talent in original composition for the piano is described by composer, pianist, teacher and recording artist Claire Ritter as "imaginative and unique with very lyrical sensibilities for touch, feel and expression."

Hutchens has been studying with Ritter in her Weddington studio for the past three years. "He shows exceptional talent," said Ritter, whose career includes numerous recordings in addition to work with well-known artists such as Dave Holland, Ran Blake, Houston Pearson and others.

Ritter explained that she works with about 20 students, mostly from Charlotte. "About half of my students are composing," noted Ritter, "though Patton is an exception within these students as he has a gift with imagination and can create an entire piece from just a very few ideas."

"I see and hear music everywhere and in everyday things," says Hutchens. "I can be outside or around the house and get inspiration from the wind through the trees or the curvature of a piece of furniture. I'll hear chord structures in my head. A sharp edge might inspire a staccato chord or a warmly colored room may invoke a legato chord."

Hutchens recently performed in a recital held by Ritter that featured her students. His original score, "Appalachia," was the closing piece to the recital. A contemporary work that is richly textured, the piece is hauntingly beautiful and was inspired by Hutchens' mountain visits.

Two years ago at a neighbor's holiday party, Patton sat down and began playing on the host's baby grand piano. To the delight of the guests, Patton entertained them with a medley of holiday songs that were so well received that he garnered an invitation play a private recital in a guest's home on a piano that was more than 100 years old.

"My playing has exposed me to some wonderful opportunities," said

Hutchens. "I initially thought that particular piano was so old and fragile it would crumble when I played it. To my great surprise, it had a uniquely special feel and sound and was incredible to play."

He'll have the opportunity to play at several holiday parties this year and says he feels "guilty" about accepting compensation for doing something he loves.

The piano is just one of the five musical instruments that Patton plays and has studied. His musical prowess extends to the baritone, tenor and alto saxophones and the bass clarinet. Reluctant to categorize his music, Hutchens writes and enjoys playing contemporary work with several influences.

His iPod has music as diverse as Led Zeppelin, Simon and Garfunkel, Supertramp and his favorite band, Five for Fighting.

With many years ahead of him to narrow down career choices, Hutchens' interests include the medical field and architecture. Music will be central in wherever his pursuits take him, and he has hopes to one day attend an Ivy League school. With his talent and motivation, he should have that opportunity well within his grasp.

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