

GOOD LIVING

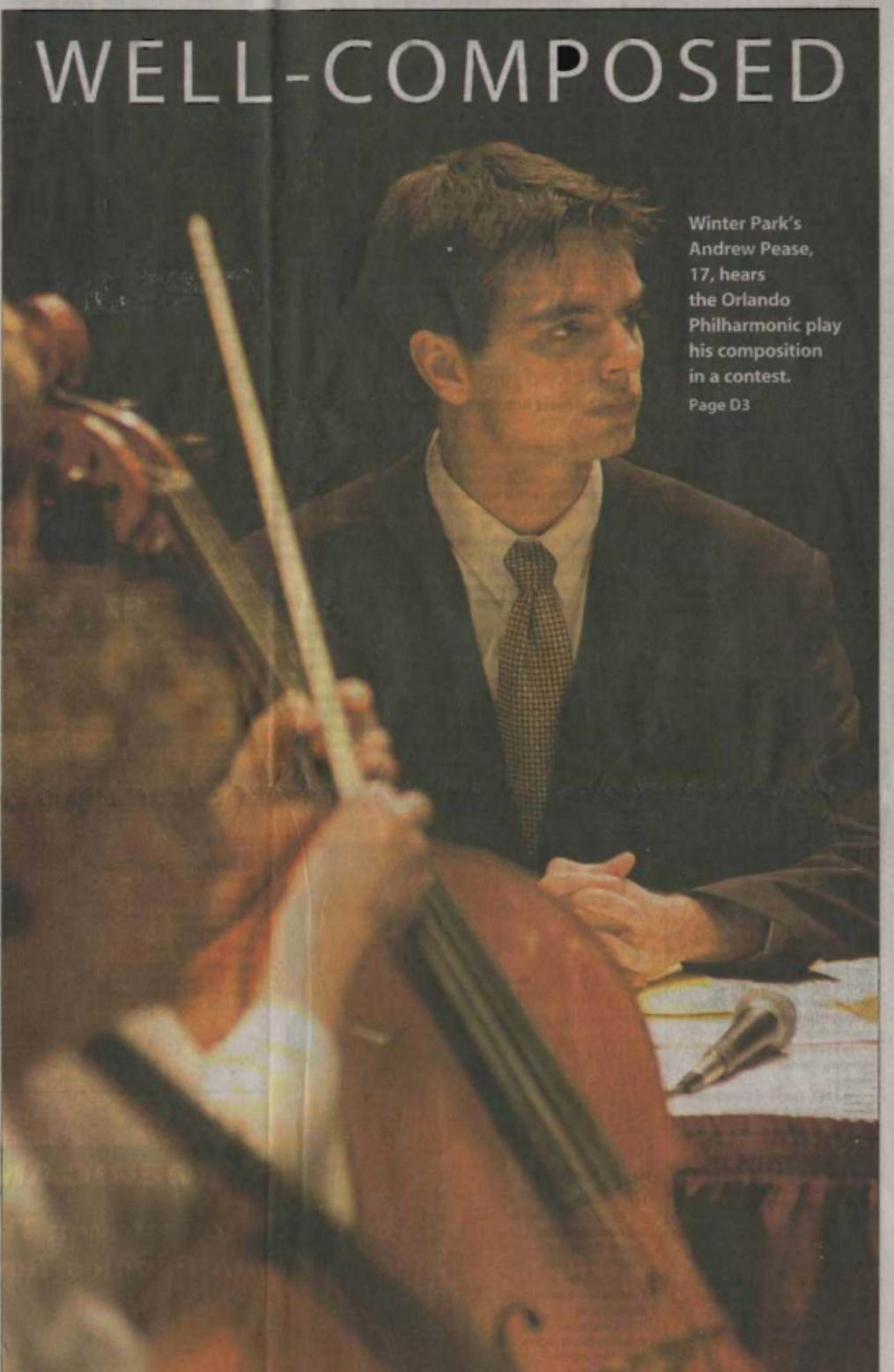
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WELL-COMPOSED



Winter Park's Andrew Pease, 17, hears the Orlando Philharmonic play his composition in a contest.

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PHOTOS BY PHYLIS NEWMAN/SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Joseph Colombo, 18, is a pro at the Young Composer's Challenge. Still, he said it was 'an adrenaline rush' hearing the Orlando Philharmonic play his 'A Dreamer's Field of Stars.'

fresh faces in music

Concerted efforts

Philanthropist Steve Goldman's Young Composer's Challenge draws 6 teens who have the talent to 'totally flabbergast.'

By SARAH LANGHEIN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

For a kid who says he's fraught with the jitters, Joseph Colombo doesn't let it show.

Even as the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra performs the 18-year-old's original score, he appears at ease, even at peace — a departure from the likes of his competition.

The five other teens all act as expected: nervous and even uncomfortable at times.

And why shouldn't they? To have their music polished, critiqued and performed by professional musicians is truly a once-in-a-lifetime moment. Half have composed music for a chamber ensemble and half for a full orchestra.

"It's practically impossible to have a professional orchestra play your piece," Orlando arts philanthropist Steve Goldman says of up-and-coming composers. That's why Goldman, an award-winning composer himself, created the Young Composer's Challenge, a seven-state competition for teens. "If you don't support your young composers, you won't have any old composers."

And seeing how these guys haven't even picked up their high-school diplomas — or even reached high school, in one case — this recent evening before a small crowd at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre is something special.

"And the music? Well, a delighted Goldman is "totally flabbergasted."

Disparate schoolboys

These six young men, finalists chosen from a pool of 10, are as different as their music. Friends Andrew Pease, 17, and Joe Coverston, 18, are jokers. Sam Cullio, 18, is a quiet, long-haired student who finds inspiration in more contemporary music. James Everett, 16, has a spiritual and sweet way about him. Nathan Blair, the youngest of the bunch, is so serious that, at first glance, you'd put him well above his 13 years. And Colombo, he's charming and sophisticated.

Four of the teens wear suits and ties. Blair comes in a tuxedo. Colombo wears a navy suit and red



Sam Cullio (left), with judge Stella Sung, says of his 'Ethereal Motion': 'I want to show people [orchestral composition] can be cool-sounding.'

shirt, the first few buttons undone.

In this 3-year-old program, Colombo, a Winter Springs High School student, is considered an odd-timer. Last year, he took home first place for his ensemble piece. This year, he set his sights on winning with an original orchestral composition.

"It's amazing how much my style has changed," he says of the past year, which he spent honing his craft and paying attention to the details. "I hope my style and technique will set me apart."

Backstage, before 100 family and friends heard their music, that's what they're all hoping for.

Coverston, of Winter Park High School, says his first draft of "Nocturne of an Autumn Night" came to him in two hours. He reworked it for the next month.

"Oftentimes, your best work will come when you're sitting down doing something else," he says.

For him, that was very late at night.

Cullio, of Boone High School, explains his piece, "Ethereal Motion," like this: "It's not traditional. It's not classical. It's a combination of rock 'n' roll and jazz."

"I want to show people [orchestral composition] can be cool-sounding. It doesn't have to be strict."

But strict is what Nathan, of Cumming, Ga., does best.

"The art of classical music inspires me. My musical family inspires me," he says, looking very stern and serious.

But is he nervous?

"No, I'm very optimistic," he says.

Conducting themselves properly

But the 13-year-old's body language on stage says otherwise. With his strong facial expressions and tendency to chew on his fingers, Nathan finally shows his age.

He bobs his head to the beat and closely watches the conductor. The piece is started over twice so that members of the orchestra can ask Nathan questions about his composition. When the music ends, the judges give their thoughts.

"You're 14 years old?" Goldman asks him.

"Thirteen," Nathan replies.

"I'm not even going to..." Goldman says smiling and shaking his head.

But Keith Lay, a music instructor at Full Sail arts academy, says what appears to be on everyone's mind: "I'm so looking forward to what you'll do [in the future]."

When the orchestra finishes with Pease's piece, "Dark Flare," Lay tells him: "I think that you should be writing for Tim Burton."

The judges call Cullio's composition "rich," saying they applaud his adventurous move into harmonies. They later award him first place in the ensemble section with a \$500 scholarship and \$1,000 to his school.

"I'm really happy and surprised," he says later. "Part of the excitement was the spontaneity."

When the full orchestra plays Colombo's "A Dreamer's Field of Stars," he sits with one arm slung over the back of his chair, like he has done this 100 times before. Granted, he had some additional experience because the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra played his piece in March as part of its pops series.

"It was better this time," he says after learning of his victory (a \$2,000 scholarship and \$3,500 to his school). "Either way, I knew it would be a good experience. It was exciting, an adrenaline rush."

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