

Student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder Excels with Music

Celeste comes from a long line of musicians. Her grandfather and his brothers were professional musicians, her mother sings and plays guitar, her father plays the bass guitar and two of her siblings play the piano. Celeste Pierre, 12 has learned to play thirty blues, jazz, classical, accompaniment and contemporary pieces in one year of taking piano lessons. She can sight read lead sheets, compose and write lyrics for her own songs and arrange the songs in her repertoire. She plays confidently in public and sings while she plays. When she is not playing the piano, she is playing her harmonica, recorder, accordion, or the percussion instruments in her school band in Bellevue.

Sound impressive? It is. Celeste has been diagnosed with PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder-NotOtherwiseSpecified), an autistic-spectrum disorder, since age two. Her mother, Deanna Pierre says, "The piano is her friend which allows her to "speak" through her music. Her language and social skills are impaired, so music helps her to express herself."

Celeste has been taking Simply

Music piano lessons from Janita Pavelka, an Associate Simply Music Teacher in Bellevue for one year. Simply Music is an Australian-developed piano program that has students playing contemporary, blues, jazz, classical and accompaniment pieces—immediately—from their very first lessons. The Australian method temporarily delays traditional music-reading and introduces a 'playing-based' approach which allows the students to have an intimate relationship with the keyboard without having to read the music first.

Celeste is advancing quickly with the piano, with a noticeable jump this summer in her cognitive abilities and understanding. She is more responsive in lessons and has a longer attention span. Her language has increased and her listening and comprehension skills are markedly improved over a year ago. She can now tolerate 30 minutes of lessons vs. 15 when she first started. Celeste allows Mrs. Pavelka to correct her touch and Celeste will sometimes lay her hands on top of her piano teacher's to understand how to play the

songs.

Celeste looks forward to lessons and will draw pictures of her Playlist and compositions for her teacher. Her creations are sweet and gentle like Celeste. This week she brought her child-sized accordion to lessons to play "America", "Amazing Grace", "She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain" and other songs for Mrs. Pavelka. She continues to reach out and form a bond with her piano teacher.

Lloyd Pierre, an Air Force flight medicine physician stationed at Offutt Air Force Base, was on temporary duty for 100 days last fall. When he arrived home from Iraq, he was amazed at her quick advancement with the piano. It inspired him to join her in learning a musical instrument. At the Spring Recital, the Pierres entertained the crowd with a family band playing "Go Tell It on the Mountain." During the Christmas season, Celeste and two of her siblings played at No Frills



in Bellevue for the Salvation Army Bell Ringers. She was extremely comfortable performing for the shoppers.

Her mother, Deanna comments on how musical and artistic her daughter is. "Celeste loves to play piano. She practices on her own multiple times each day. Music is another way for Celeste to communicate with the world. I highly recommend Simply Music for all

children, especially children with autistic traits."

For more information on a Simply Music program near you, contact: East Bellevue (293-5577); West Bellevue (293-1630), West Omaha (397-7310); Crossroads (397-1597); Zorinsky Lake (333-7811); Benson (451-2925); Irvington Exit (408-3985); Rockbrook (391-4658); Blair (426-3997)