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The Dream is Alive

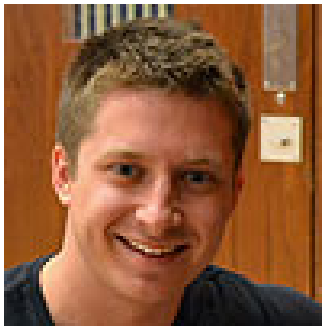
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The Dream is Alive

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Pianist and University of Dayton senior Nick Fister has an audience numbering in the millions on YouTube. And like many viral video stories, his success was quite unintended.

The entrepreneurship and finance double major likes to amuse friends and strangers with a 21st century version of a Victorian parlor game — a friend pulls up a song on a smartphone, everyone listens, and Fister plays it from memory.

That's how he came to record a clip that has received 1.8 million YouTube views. Four years ago, a friend played Clint Mansell's song "Requiem for a Dream" about "three or four times," Fister said, before he sat at the piano — bare feet, sleeveless shirt — and played the six-minute piece from memory, hands flying between octaves.

"When I hear music, I hear numbers," he said, emphasizing his play-by-ear skill is the result of years of training and study of music theory. "Whether it's the number in a chord progression or the number of notes on a scale, I can see them."

That video was his first, and it remains his most popular. He attributes the success mostly to serendipity — the song appeared in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which came out around the time the video was posted. As the views accumulated, he quickly recognized the potential for using YouTube as a platform for sharing his music. Four years on, he takes requests from viewers and uploads custom arrangements of pop songs as well as original compositions, sharing them on his "Nick Fister Piano" Facebook page.

"I absolutely love playing music for people who enjoy listening to music," he said. "I enjoy that more than playing music by myself, and I enjoy that a lot."

Classically trained from age 7 by Russian pianist Oliya Etina, Fister has taken lessons from University of Dayton artist-in-residence Phillip Farris. But most of his study now happens solo, writing and rewriting music.

"I'm always working on something new, it's never a finished process. I think that's related to my interest in improvisation — it's a freedom of unique expression. I don't have to play what someone else wrote. I can communicate my own emotions," he said.

The Cincinnati native was drawn to the University of Dayton, he said, because of its sense of community and its strong business program. But he also appreciates the access non-majors have to the arts.

"The University has done a great job cultivating an appreciation for music in its students. People are willing to come out and

listen to me play, and I receive support from the music department and the entire arts community."

Fister has paired a love of music with a passion for film. He has a mentorship via Skype with Los Angeles film composer Ryan Shore, and he is preparing for an audition to the Berklee College of Music, where he hopes to study film score composition.

"I knew from the beginning that I wanted to first get a degree in business because the music industry is so competitive," he said. "My business degree will be extremely beneficial, and the music studies should make me well-rounded and give me an edge."

But he's playing it by ear. Fister also has received a job offer from an L.A. studio where he can learn more about the music for film industry. Either path could be an entry into writing scores and a step closer to his dream of one day opening his own business to support aspiring film composers.

For now, he's content to finish out his tenure at the University of Dayton and keep playing for his growing online audience.

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