

That kid can play

by Margaret Miller, contributing writer

Mozart wasn't the only musician who showed talent at an early age. Lots of kids show signs of musical talent before they're old enough to read and write—and smart parents encourage them to pursue their passion.

Melinda Winchell, the mother of three girls and two boys, says that her children enjoy performing more than competing. All have taken piano lessons and have been involved in church and community choirs. "By participating in ensembles and musical groups, they've learned the value of 'team spirit' without actually being on a 'team,'" Melinda said.

At 13, Margaret Winchell maintains that music has been part of her life for as long as she can recall. "I remember hearing my sister play the piano when I was really young, and I liked banging around on it," she said. "But I wanted to learn to play 'real stuff,' so I begged my mom to let me take piano lessons. Ever since then, I've enjoyed music, even if I'm just humming some little tune or tapping out a rhythm without noticing."

Students at The Village School are required to choose band, orchestra, or choir when they enter fourth grade. That's when Margaret decided to play the French horn—a notoriously difficult instrument. Still, her music teacher said that if anyone could play it, Margaret could. And she did! Margaret's straight-A report card is proof that individuals who are gifted in music also excel in academics. "It's not the best part about being a musician, but it's a fun little bonus you get along the way!" she said, with a laugh.

For this aspiring artist, the biggest challenge is that you can't get better unless you practice, and you don't want to practice something you're not good at. "It's a vicious cycle!" Margaret said. "You have to make yourself practice and try

to turn it into something you want to do, not have to do."

A serious music student, Margaret attended American Festival for the Arts for five weeks last summer. "It's always exciting to practice your part and then play with the group," she said. "I enjoy playing in a group much more than practicing by myself."

Margaret has no doubt that some part of what she does after college will be related to music, maybe combining her love of music with something academic. "Music therapists do it, so why can't I?" Margaret said.

Like Margaret, Westchester Academy student Sarah Slack has always loved music—and when she began singing in her church choir, it was clear that she had talent. The director suggested that she

try out for the Houston Children's Chorus. She's been with the group ever since, first in the Apprentice Choir and now in the Concert Choir. "Concert Choir performs more songs. At first I had to sit down at night and look over the music," she said. "It was like homework!"

Comprised of more than 200 Houston school children in grades second through eighth, the chorus rehearses every Tuesday for 90 minutes and performs throughout the year. Sarah has sung at Carnegie Hall and at President Bush's

41st birthday party. On Saturday, December 16, the chorus will present its 18th Annual Christmas Concert, featuring both sacred and secular music of the season.

Sarah also studies piano and enjoys playing duets with her dad. A musician himself, Greg plays trombone in a charity band called the Houston High Rollers and often improvises on the piano as his daughter performs *Tuxedo Junction* from memory. "Piano is easier than singing," Sarah said. "I'm getting really good at it."



The violin is the perfect instrument for Alix's long fingers.