

AF Youth Orchestra Is Internet Sensation

Danny Crivello - American Fork Citizen | Posted: Tuesday, February 14, 2012 7:00 am

American Fork Bands made their city proud last month, when they marched at the 2012 Rose Parade, an event watched by millions and broadcast on multiple TV networks.

Now, American Fork has one million more reasons to be proud: A piece by a local youth orchestra has topped one million YouTube views in just four days, while becoming the most downloaded classical music on iTunes in the United States and Canada, ahead of Yo-Yo Ma and Andrea Bocelli.

The skyrocketing stardom is the latest sign of the viral power of the Internet and its social media, which have propelled the careers of many young musicians.

The piece, "Beethoven's 5 Secrets," is played by the Lyceum Philharmonic, a 60-member orchestra hosted by American Heritage School, whose ages range from 13 to 18.

The piece combines OneRepublic's tune "Secrets" with melodies and moments from all four movements of Beethoven's 5th Symphony, a mix of culture and cool that CBS News reviewed as "pure amazing."

"The most difficult thing about this song was perfecting it," said Kristy Duncan, 17, who has been a member of the orchestra for four years. "Even though we played it countless times, I'm still not tired of it. It's exciting to play a part in this orchestra and in this song."

The orchestra is assisted by soloist Steven Sharp Nelson. Nelson, who studied music and earned degrees from the University of Utah, is a professional artist in Salt Lake City. He has recorded on hundreds of albums and recently became a YouTube sensation, garnering millions of views on a channel named "The Piano Guys," after a St George-based music video production company.

Lyceum Philharmonic Director Kayson Brown said he approached Nelson at a music festival last summer with the idea of having students collaborate on a piece. In January, the orchestra and Nelson went to a professional recording studio and recorded the audio. The video taping was done both at the auditorium in the school and near St George. The video was released on YouTube Thursday.

"Our students have been richly blessed by Steven and the Piano Guys who have staked their reputation on the abilities of teenagers," Brown said. "Steven is an endlessly creative and demanding professional and the production value of the Piano Guys contributed massively to the success of this venture."

Although this after-school orchestra is hosted and sponsored by American Heritage School, a K-12 private institution, there are many students who drive each week from as far away as Beaver and Tooele to be in the Philharmonic, which has won the award for 'Best Youth Performing Group' for the past three years. "The excellence of our program is due to the amazing support we receive from talented musicians that come from public and charter schools across the state," Brown said. "This program is open to all music students Kindergarten through 12th grade who are willing to take the initiative and use their discretionary time, talent and resources

towards an exceptional music education."

"Beethoven's 5 Secrets" now ranks in the top 10 classical Apple's iTunes downloads in 10 countries. The YouTube video has an instrumental and vocal versions, together accumulating over 1 million views. The video was produced by the Piano Guys, who said they loved the idea of the collaboration.

"It combined two of the things we are working to accomplish -- inviting people to classical music and inspiring young musicians," the company wrote on YouTube. "Steven Sharp Nelson... loved the spirit and the talent that the orchestra showed at such young ages."

The American Heritage Lyceum Philharmonic has also recorded a professional CD featuring both sacred and classical music. It was recorded at Abravanel Hall and should be available shortly on iTunes and hopefully at Deseret Book, Brown said.

The orchestra will also offer a live performance with Nelson during the Lyceum Music Festival, an American Heritage-sponsored annual event that takes place in the summer at Park City and has brought students from a dozen states. The festival is expanding to two weeks, according to Brown, and will also feature Igor and Vesna Gruppman.

The YouTube music video starts with a quote from Beethoven: "Don't only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets, for it and knowledge can raise men to the divine."

Kristy said she believes that both songs, Beethoven's 5th Symphony and *Secrets*, came from the heart and that secrets are shared through heartfelt music. "The hard part is sometimes finding the secrets within that music," she said. "Kayson and Steven were able to find those secrets and link it with the knowledge they have to create something truly divine -- and really fun."