

True
Teen
Story

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The Amazing Darrius Simmons

How a teen boy from Ohio ended up playing piano at Carnegie Hall—one of the world's most famous concert halls

BY MICHELLE CROUCH

VOCABULARY

effortlessly: done in a way that makes it look very easy

prostheses: artificial devices that replace missing or injured parts of the body

technique: the way a person performs basic movements or skills

thunderous: making a loud sound (like thunder)

regardless of: without paying attention to



Music of

VIDEO 1

VIDEO 2

GO TO
WEB VIEW

At a mall in Ohio, a teenage boy sits at a keyboard in a music store and starts to play. His fingers glide **effortlessly** over the keys, and beautiful music fills the air.

Shoppers stop and listen. A crowd gathers. People pull out their phones to record him.

Those who look closer are even more astonished—because there’s something extraordinary about Darrius Simmons, the boy making magic at the keyboard.

He’s playing with only four fingers.

Darrius, 18, was born with three fingers on his right hand

and one on his left hand. He was also missing bones in his lower legs. But Darrius has never let these challenges get in the way.

When he was just a toddler, doctors fitted Darrius with artificial legs called **prostheses**. They were uncomfortable to wear at first, but Darrius was determined to walk.

He spent hours practicing by holding on to furniture. When he was almost 3, he took his first real steps, and his family celebrated.

As Darrius grew older, he had to work hard to do things

that were easy for other kids. Anytime someone tried to help, he would say, “I can do it myself.”

For example, he learned to use the three fingers on his right hand to hold a fork. He also taught himself to write—and before long, he was playing basketball, football, and video games with his friends.

Learning to Play

When Darrius was 10, he told his grandfather how much he enjoyed the piano music at church. “It’s too bad you can’t play,” his grandfather

responded. Darrius took that as a challenge.

He asked the music director at church to teach him some simple songs. “I like to show people I can do things they think I can’t do,” he says.

When Darrius was in eighth grade, his mother bought him an electric keyboard. He would listen to a song and then try to figure out how to play it, often practicing for two or three hours a day.

“Getting my hand placement was the hard part,” Darrius recalls. “Everyone else has 10 fingers, and I have 4. So I had to come up with my own **technique**.” He also had to figure out how to play the pedal

with his prostheses.

Darrius’s favorite piano song is called “River Flows in You” by a Korean composer named Yiruma. It took Darrius almost a year to learn it, but he felt incredibly proud when he *finally* mastered the difficult piece.

A Big Performance

When Darrius was 15, a local television news station heard about his talent and did a story about him. In the video, they showed him playing Yiruma’s song.

Someone sent the video to Yiruma, and he invited Darrius to play with him at Carnegie Hall—a famous concert hall in New York City!

After meeting backstage, Darrius and Yiruma walked onto the stage together. The lights were so bright that Darrius had to squint to see the audience. All 2,800 seats were filled. “The people in the back were so far away they looked like little specks,” he recalls.

Darrius and Yiruma played a duet, and the audience gave them

a **thunderous** standing ovation. “I was excited to play in Carnegie Hall, but I was even more excited about meeting Yiruma,” Darrius remembers. “It was the best moment of my life.”

Darrius told Yiruma he dreamed of being a composer—that he had music in his head all the time. Yiruma encouraged Darrius to follow his dream.

A Song of His Own

Darrius was inspired, and he began writing his own songs when he got home. The first one was called “Dreams Are Forever.” He posted it on Facebook last year, and the video went viral. It now has more than 4 million views.

Yiruma saw the video and called Darrius to congratulate him. He encouraged Darrius to continue making music.

Darrius, now 18, is writing more songs. When he graduates in May, he hopes to travel the country to play music and share his story.

He says he wants people to appreciate the music he’s making **regardless of** how many fingers he has on his hands. “I may have a disability,” Darrius declares, “but I don’t let it hold me back from anything.” •



MUSIC LOVER

1. Darrius poses with his grandfather after a band performance.
2. Darrius and Yiruma talk at Carnegie Hall.