

## Musician's hard work pays off

**Michael Bellart**

Staff Writer

Richmond Heights resident Michael Schneider played his first piano piece a month before he turned 3.

As a toddler, he spent hours on his mother's lap while she taught basic piano to his siblings. Always a quiet child, the now 27-year-old pianist said he just sat there and paid attention.

One day, after Schneider's mother had sent his older brother and sister off on the school bus, she heard the piano being played.

Just as she began to threaten who she thought was a truant child, she walked in on young Michael, feet dangling from the piano bench, playing the same song she had been teaching the older children.

Schneider will play for a much larger audience today at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

He received the invitation to play after winning second prize at the 26th Frinna Awerbuch International Piano Competition in New York, where 60 pianists from around the world competed.

Schneider also won a special award for best performance of an American work.

After his first performance,

Schneider's mother began teaching him. At age 3, Schneider played by ear, but his mother forced him to read music — something he doesn't remember learning.

"I don't remember learning to read music. It was always just there," he said. "I suppose it's like not remembering when you learned to speak English."

When he turned 6, his mother stopped teaching, and he began private lessons.

"I don't think she felt qualified, and (she) wanted another teacher to take me further," he said.

Schneider earned his bachelor's degree in piano performance from the University of North Texas in Denton. He spent the next two years working for a post-bachelor's artistic certificate.

He is pursuing a master's degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

He is the resident concert pianist for "The Mighty Wurlitzer Radio Hour," which airs four times a year on WCLV-FM 104.9. The next show will be at 7 p.m.



Schneider

Dec. 15.

He also will perform Tuesday at the institute's PianoFest.

Performing in the United States and abroad, Schneider has played with almost a dozen symphonies. He played with the Texas-based San Angelo Symphony when he was 11.

Because he started playing at a young age — and was always expected to play at family functions — Schneider said he never got nervous playing in front of crowds.

"I was always performing in front of people," he said. "So I never developed any fears of performing."

This past summer, Schneider played in the International Chopin Festival in France. He was a prize winner at several competitions, including the Paderewski international Piano Competition in Poland.

He will continue to compete.

"The next four to five years is the time when I'm going to go to some of the more prestigious competitions," he said.

Schneider said he would like to sustain a performing career.

"My goal, as someone who loves music and was trained in the art of classical music, is to bring music to as many people as possible," he said.