

Child's Play

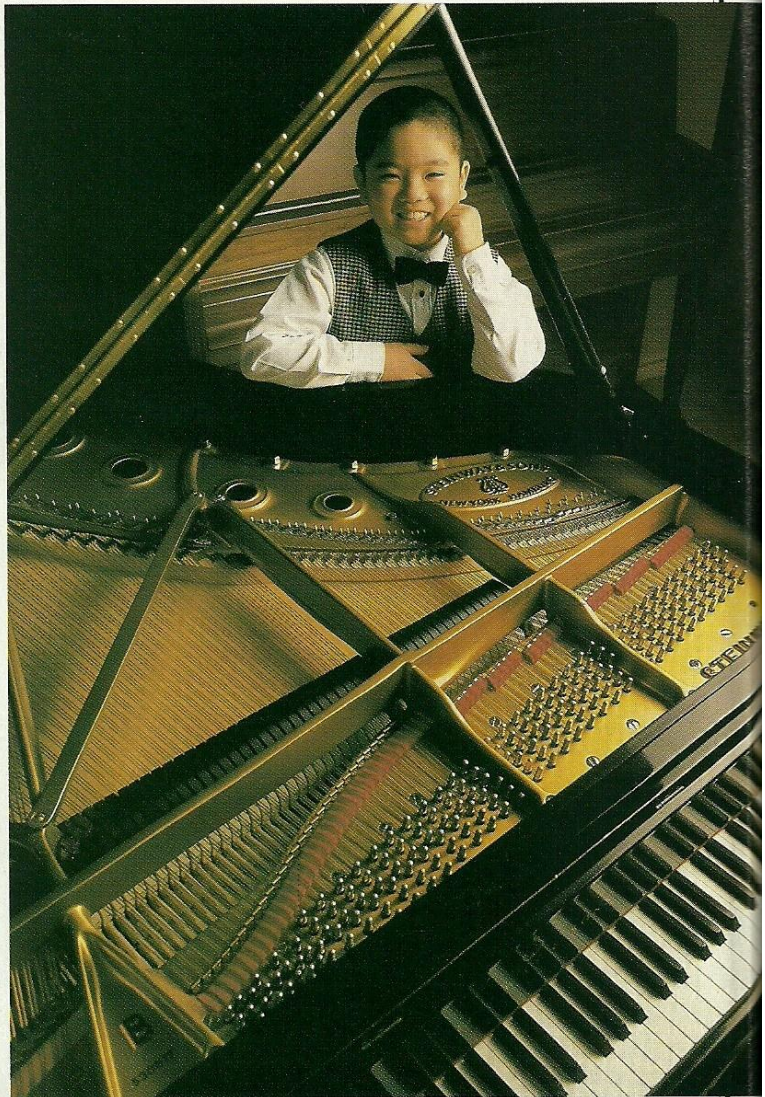
At nine, Carrollton's Albert Wong can barely reach the piano pedals. But his talent is nothing short of prodigious.

by Dawn McMullan

WHEN ALBERT WONG was one and a half years old, he sang perfectly the words to the recorded Chinese songs his mother played while rocking him to sleep. When he was three, he could read and count to one hundred and was curious about infinity and negative numbers. At three and a half Albert decided he wanted to learn how to play the piano. At five he started taking lessons from a music professor at the University of North Texas in Denton, and at six he began giving recitals at the university. When he was eight, he was featured at the opening of the Texas Steinway Society's concert season. And on January 1, his feet barely reaching the piano's pedals, he celebrated his ninth birthday by playing with the Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth in its annual all-Mozart New Year's program. "A remarkable talent," raved the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. "He has already conquered the issue of volume control in Mozart—the elusive ability to project an accent or forte without destroying the delicacy of the music."

"As far as raw talent, he could go just about as far as he wants—he could be a top professional pianist if he wants to," says UNT's Joseph Banowetz, who has been Albert's private teacher since September 1995. "I've seen child prodigies before, but not a lot at this level." Is Albert the next Van Cliburn? Maybe. The most charismatic four-foot-four concert pianist in the Metroplex? Definitely. At an age when most kids choke up during the school play, Albert lives to perform. "I don't get nervous," he says. "There is nothing to worry about."

He certainly seemed relaxed at the Steinway Society concert last October. He and Banowetz played a duet—three of Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances*—sitting side by side, Banowetz on a regular piano bench, Albert on his own, taller one. As he played, his face showed the intensity of a child entranced by a video game—and the faces of women in the audience changed from the serious ex-



The Wong show: "It was a bit difficult when I played at first," he says. "Now, it's easy."

The full text of this article is available from [Texas Monthly](#).