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Young pianist champing at chance to make her mark in music world

By GENE PEREIRA

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Samantha Polczer looks and acts like any normal 17-year-old girl.

That is, until she sits down to play the piano. Only then does the musical talent that separates this teenager from her peers become obvious. That talent helped the Mississauga resident get selected from among 18 candidates to represent the Toronto zone at the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association provincial student competition in March at Thunder Bay.

Polczer's win in the Toronto zone finals at the Royal Conservatory of Music Concert Hall Jan. 14 was the first time a student of the Etobicoke-Mississauga branch won the zone finals.

Her most recent piano coup was earned last week when she was a first-place winner in the trophy class at Toronto's Kiwanis Music Festival. Polczer's playing scored 89 of a possible 100 points and earned her a spot in this Friday's Kiwanis finals.

But playing the piano isn't the only thing Polczer does extremely well. Polczer attends the Peel School of Arts at Cawthra Park where she's a vocal major and drama minor. With this list of credits one would expect her to have time for little else.

"Actually I still get to go out a lot and do a lot of the normal stuff teenagers do," said Polczer who includes composing music, horseback riding and swimming as other interests.

"Basically all my friends go to art school so we have almost the same interests and involvement in the arts. We like to go to operas like *Phantom of the Opera* or listen to jazz music," added Polczer, who was the featured



Staff photo by Rob Beintema

Budding Mississauga pianist Samantha Polczer is going to Thunder Bay to represent the Toronto zone in the Ontario Registered Music Teachers' Association provincial student competition.

piano soloist at the annual music department concert.

Renowned concert pianist, teacher and mother Helen Polczer is Samantha's piano and vocal coach. For Polczer, her mother's influence has been a big part of her success.

"My mom teaches a lot of students and I don't get to see her as often as I would like," said Polczer who practises in her mother's large piano studio in Mississauga. "But she always finds time to talk to me. We're like really good friends. She's critical of my performances. Sometimes I'll feel great about what I played but after she'll come up to me and tell me you didn't do this and didn't do that. That really helps me because I get good feedback, which helps me to perform better next time."

Polczer was born in Vienna, Austria, and immigrated with her family to Canada in 1986. She

studied ballet, modern dance and jazz for eight years with teachers from the Kirov Ballet in Russia and the Royal Academy of Dance in England. The pianist would like to return to Vienna.

"I'm in my final year of school at Cawthra and I'm thinking of going to university next year," said Polczer.

The teenager laughs when asked about how much time she spends practising her piano playing. "I don't practise nearly as much as I should," said Polczer, who spends three hours a day at the piano when nearing performances. "When I'm sitting down at the piano you can't get me away from it. But I have to be dragged there at first."

As for the future, Polczer's plans are indefinite. "I'm not sure if playing the piano is what I want to do. I enjoy playing but there is a lot of pressure when you perform."