

# Violin prodigy among Jefferson Awards recipients

ULA ILNYTZKY - Associated Press - Associated Press

He is a violin prodigy who has channeled his musical talents to raise more than \$5 million for pediatric medical research around the globe, headlining benefit concerts at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and other venues.

Jourdan Urbach will be honored for his achievement on Tuesday with one of the nation's highest public service awards — the Jefferson Awards.

The resident of the Long Island community of Roslyn founded Concerts for a Cure when he was only 7 years old. Since then, he has raised \$5.1 million to fight children's neurological diseases and fund research. Through benefit concerts, he has funded 12 life-saving neurosurgeries, 1,000 cochlear implants, pediatric clinics in Africa and El Salvador and a bedside music program at the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital.

He is among four Americans 25 years and under to be recognized as a Jefferson Awards "Globe Changer," said Sam Beard, who founded the awards known as "the Nobel Prize for public service" with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and U.S. Sen. Robert Taft Jr. in 1972.

"He's 20 years old and he's basically transformed the way hospitals raise money," said Beard, adding he has never seen someone so young raise so much money.

"He's passionate about the kids who have neurological diseases," Beard said. "He figured he had musical talent and if he could combine it with his goals he could make a difference."

Winning the Jefferson Award is "a massive honor," Urbach said in a telephone interview a day before the awards ceremony.

It is a recognition young people don't expect to get "and when we do, it's a vote of confidence that often helps us out down the line with our further endeavors," he said.

Urbach, who will play his own composition at the ceremony, is completing his studies in music composition at Yale University.

He showed a passion for music and science at an early age. He began playing violin at 2 1/2. In 1st grade, he wrote a letter to Dr. Fred Epstein, a pre-eminent pediatric neurosurgeon at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan, requesting an interview for a paper he wanted to write on neurosurgeons.

The doctor invited him to the hospital and gave him a tour of the intensive care unit.

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"That completely flipped my view of the world," said Urbach. "All I wanted to do is bring those patients something that was beyond those walls."

He recalled turning to Epstein and saying: "I'm going to help your kids."

So the doctor suggested that the 7-year-old bring some friends and perform for his patients. He did, first performing in a hospital playroom and later going room to room playing for bedridden patients.

Urbach said Concerts for a Cure started its fundraising activities two years later after he met a 13-year-old patient, a pianist who couldn't practice because there was no piano on the hospital floor.

"I set a goal. I was going to buy a piano for the 10th floor," he said. "I put on a concert at my school. We raised enough money to buy a piano and thousands more, enough to start a fund to bring underprivileged kids from all over the world to have surgery at Beth Israel."

At the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Michigan, Urbach's concert raised money for a Ronald McDonald space within the hospital and for its bedside music program that provides live music in the neonatal units, said Elaine Sims, director of the Gifts of Art program at the University of Michigan Health System.

"Another grant from Jourdan is funding a music delivery system for our pediatric oncology inpatients," she said. "The funds Jourdan has raised for us have inspired others to give. It's a cumulative snowball effect that just keeps growing."

About three years ago, Urbach founded another nonprofit organization, the International Coalition of College Philanthropists, which raises money through various campus events for health, education and shelter projects.

ICCP "allows university students to leverage a network of students and college campuses to raise a lot of funds ... and then intelligently inject them into microfinance projects," said Urbach. In its first year, the organization donated \$40,000 to build a clinic in Ghana, fund a Connecticut chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society and finance several Third World projects, including education for 20 children in rural India, he said.

In addition to raising money for neuroscience, Urbach delves deeply into the subject, said Arney Rosenblat, a spokeswoman for the MS Society. In 2005, she said, he conducted independent research on multiple sclerosis at Stony Brook University Medical Center.

"Jourdan has dramatically illustrated that a small hinge can swing large doors," she said.

The Jefferson Globe Changer award also went to Rachel Okun, 16, and her 13-year-old sister Kelsi, of McLean, Va., for raising \$7.5 million in scholarships for children of

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military veterans through their nonprofit ThanksUSA. Charles OrgBon III, 16, of Hoshton, Ga., was recognized for his Greening Forward initiative, which has recycled more than 8,000 tons of waste around the world.

Eagles defensive back Troy Vincent was honored for outstanding service by an athlete.

The 2012 Jefferson Lifetime Achievement Award went to the Tribeca Film Festival, co-founded by Robert DeNiro, Jane Rosenthal and Craig Hatkoff.

Pfizer was awarded the Jefferson Award for outstanding service by a major corporation.

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[www.jeffersonawards.org](http://www.jeffersonawards.org)

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