

By Kartikeya Ramanathan, 14/03/2011

Hitting a mature key

German teenager Elias Opferkuch raises money for and spreads awareness about brain and synapse related diseases through his music

He is just 14 years old, but the head he has on his shoulders is of a much more mature person. Even at this young age, he feels the need to help those who are less privileged. Recently in the city to give a performance, German western classical pianist Elias Leonard Opferkuch Renz, who calls himself just Elias Opferkuch, works towards raising awareness and money for brain and synapse related problems.

"Whatever value systems I have got are from my parents," says the talented teenager, who turns 15 on March 24. "My parents have set an example for me in every walk of life, and this is no exception. Helping others comes very naturally to me. My parents, as activists for the Neurosurgery Help Foundation, a German NGO, have impressed upon me from the very first, the importance of spreading awareness about brain-related diseases. Unfortunately, this organ is not taken as seriously as perhaps it ought to be," he adds.

Born in Aalen, Germany, Elias started to learn how to play the piano at the age of five, and gave his first public performance when he was just six. Since then, he has had benefit concerts in Germany, Russia, Poland, Hungary and Austria, having raised 25,000 euros (more than Rs 15.5 lakhs) for the cause. While he also performed in Pune, he was not here to raise money; instead, he came down to India to spread awareness about the disease, as part of an initiative of the Indian wing of the Neurosurgery Help Foundation - the Synapse Brain & Spine Foundation of India. "I feel like I should use my talents to do something to help those less fortunate than me, and I feel no one is too young to work for a social cause," he says.

Elias generally plays the works of Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, Glinka and Corea, but like every artiste, he has his favourites. "Chopin and Tchaikovsky are two composers who have taken music to a whole new plane of existence," he says. Currently a student at the Kopernikus Secondary School in Wasseraffingen, Elias is a recipient of a special award by the Paul- Hindemith Foundation for the best interpretation of a piece of the classical modernity in Freiburg at the prestigious Competition for New Music. He is also a talented skier and can also play the drums and the trombone.

Dr Jayadev Panchawagh, who is part of the Synapse Brain & Spine Foundation of India, says that the biggest problem in India is the fact that society does not understand the complexity of a brain surgery. "For such a delicate procedure, one needs advanced instruments, which necessarily push up the costs of the operation itself. Patients are also generally not well-informed about these surgeries, and thus a vicious circle is born." Panchawagh also feels that since no proper statistics for brain-related diseases are kept in India, doctors are forced to turn to US stats. "And they give an incomplete picture," he adds.

IndianExpress

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"Whatever value systems I have got are from my parents," says the talented teenager, who turns 15 on March 24. "My parents have set an example for me in every walk of life, and this has inspired me. Helping others comes very naturally to me. My parents, as activists for the Neurosurgery Help Foundation, a German NGO, have impressed upon me from the very first, the importance of spreading awareness about brain related diseases. Unfortunately, this aspect is not taken as seriously as perhaps it ought to be," he adds.

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