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Piano Prodigy From St. Croix, Chris Tirado, Hones Talent at Liberty University

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Christopher Tirado, right, with saxophonist Joseph Henson.

Editor's Note: The following story is a repost from Liberty University, based in Virginia. It highlights Christopher Tirado, who [in July 2015 was featured on the Consortium](#) when he was 14 years old and was chosen because of his exceptional skills as a young pianist to attend one of the U.S.'s most prestigious camps, the Luzerne Music Center in New York.

Fast forward seven years later, Mr. Tirado, now 21, is [making waves](#) at LU where he currently attends and plans to attain his PhD.

Below, the story from Liberty Champion, the official student newspaper of Liberty University:

From modern Christian contemporary to Caribbean gospel hymns, piano prodigy Christopher Tirado plays anything the occasion calls for.

To the untrained ear, Tirado's playing may seem impressive, but to a skilled pianist, his wide genre range and ability to simplify complex songs is nothing short of breathtaking.

While natural talent and dedicated practice contribute to his ability, Tirado's hands are physically much bigger than a normal piano player's, which gives him a natural advantage. To put it simply, an octave is made up of eight keys. While most people can comfortably reach across nine keys with one hand, Tirado is able to reach 12 keys.

"It can be very daunting because when you start learning, it's like they're throwing a bunch of concepts at you because you have to understand the actual instrument before you play it," Tirado said.

Tirado encourages those looking to learn to play the piano to take their time learning each element slowly and intentionally to allow complex concepts to feel simple. In fact, he considers piano to be one of the simplest instruments because so much of the theory is constructed around the keyboard itself.



From left, Christopher's father Angel Tirado, Christopher, and Jessica Tirado, Christopher's mother.

“You can see it. It’s easy to visualize (theory),” Tirado said. “It’s hard to visualize on strings and frets, but piano is straightforward. You get what you get.”

Born and raised in Saint Croix, part of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Tirado, 21, takes great pride in his Caribbean culture and loves to incorporate his “Caribbean warmth” into every aspect of his life. Whether it is playing lively Caribbean gospel music or playing the classic “O’ Holy Night” at the university’s annual Christmas Coffeeshouse, Tirado takes every opportunity he has to play for people.

“I want to reach people. It means so much to me,” Tirado said.

While Tirado’s father works as a postmaster in St. Croix, he has always dreamed of being a musician himself. His passion for music helped push Tirado towards pursuing piano professionally.

As a child, Tirado expressed interest in and began learning the piano around the age of 5. By age 9, his father enrolled him in classical piano lessons to sharpen his craft. Under his father’s watchful eye, Tirado practiced up to three hours a day, learning proper posture and technique.

“I have a really cool dad. It wasn’t like a one-sided practice,” Tirado said. “It wasn’t like he just stood there. He would help me on stuff, and that was part of the practice time and learning process.”

When he was around 7, Tirado started under the tutelage of Marsha Shuman, an elderly woman who had lived on the island for about 50 years before she met the Tirados. Shuman passed away about a year ago. Tirado remembers her fondly as a talented musician who cared deeply for her students and her music.

“She was ... the head pianist and could literally sight-read anything,” Tirado said. “You know, one of those cats. She had a doctorate and a masters. ... She had all these stories because she went on performing and would go to those annual teaching conferences with other great teachers.”

Shuman worked incredibly well with children who struggled with traditional learning. Tirado, who has ADHD, remains deeply grateful for the time and care she put into teaching him that the piano exists as the perfect outlet for his energy.

“Because I play piano, I don’t have outbursts. At the piano, it’s different. That’s where you manifest your energy. Your talent can come through there,” Tirado said.

Crucians feel a deep sense of devotion to their island. Taught from a young age that representing the U.S. Virgin Islands in the U.S. is an honor, Tirado explained that many Crucians choose a career in a science-related field. However, it felt important to him to pave the way for more artists from the islands to make themselves known in America.

“My dad says you’ve got to leave the rock so that you can bring knowledge back to the rock,” Tirado said.

Not only is Tirado doing this for himself and his home, but he feels a great sense of gratitude towards his father and his teacher for instilling their love of music in him.

“It’s a family thing, but also my teacher taught me everything I know, and now she’s in a better place. I’m kind of like a living legacy of the people that have come before me,” Tirado said.

Tirado visited Liberty during his sophomore year of high school to attend a music camp he heard about from a family friend and fell in love with the school instantly. Liberty brings in many well-known Christian artists, sometimes offering early access to their music, and the technicality of the program impressed Tirado years before he attended himself.

As a junior recording engineer and producing major at Liberty, Tirado dreams of opening a recording studio in St. Croix in hopes of putting his home on the map. Performing always has and always will be a part of his life. However, the program at Liberty has given him knowledge of the production side of music in order to bring a new style of production and music back to his home.

“Music always allows people to vent out feelings or convey feelings. It’s something that helps people,” Tirado said. “It’s always been an integral part of my life. It’s more than something I do. It’s not even a question. It just will be. There will always be a piano everywhere I go.”

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