

KUHA'O'S GIFT

By David A. Edwards
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Though he is blind, this young man from Hawaii has discovered a gift that helps him see God's love.

Whenever a 15-year-old is asked to be ward organist, it's a fairly remarkable thing. When it happened to Kuha'o C. of Hawaii, it was even more remarkable for two reasons: (1) he had been playing piano for under three years and (2) he is blind.

Beginning a few years ago, Kuha'o would sit and play the piano during his regular visits to his grandparents. He didn't have a piano at home, so

 **Watch Kuha'o Play**
To see Kuha'o play the piano and to hear more of his story, visit lds.org/go/13Gift.

MUSIC HELPS ME FEEL THE SPIRIT.

it seemed like something fun to try. Soon, however, Kuha'ō moved far beyond just playing around with the keys; he was really playing—and playing well. Though he took a few lessons after that, he has been mostly self-taught.

Kuha'ō was baptized in December 2009, and around that time he started playing the organ at the ward meeting-house, usually on Saturdays while his grandfather fulfilled his building maintenance assignment. He even started waking up at 5:30 a.m. on Sundays to hear *Music and the Spoken Word* with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir so that he could listen to the organ. It wasn't long before he was asked to accompany his congregation.

One day Kuha'ō's friend Andy Thunell heard him playing and was impressed with his ability to play by ear. Andy wanted to document this feat, so he made a video recording of Kuha'ō listening to a song for the first time and then playing it right afterward. Andy posted this video on the Internet, and people were amazed. Since then, many people have taken notice of Kuha'ō, and he has started quite a career, including more online videos, performances, recordings, trips, and competitions, including one in which he won a \$10,000 first prize—which he donated to the Hawaii Association of the Blind.

As a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, Kuha'ō enjoys fulfilling his priesthood duties and serving others. "I like to serve people," he says, "because that's what it says in the scriptures—to be kind to others, to love thy neighbor as thyself, and to serve."

Like other young Latter-day Saints, Kuha'ō loves to read the scriptures (in Braille), especially the Book of Mormon, because the scriptures bring the Spirit. And when it comes right down to it, that's also why he enjoys music.

"Music helps me feel the Spirit," he says. "If I were to play something, I would hope you can feel the Spirit inside you, that the Spirit would give you a gentle touch. I feel an excitement when I play something on



either the piano or organ like 'Now Let Us Rejoice' [*Hymns*, no. 3], for example. To feel the love of Heavenly Father and that I'm really touched by the Spirit and that others are touched—this is what it's about."

Kuha'ō understands that Heavenly Father has given him a gift, a fact that is reinforced by something he carries with him all the time—his name. "My names [Kuha'ō Makana] in Hawaiian mean 'extraordinary gift,'" he explains. With his musical gift he wants to serve others, bear testimony, and help people feel close to their Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

His grandmother, Iwalani C., says that after Kuha'ō performs, "people tell him, 'You touched my heart,' or, 'You touched my spirit,' or, 'You made me cry,' because they feel the Spirit when he plays. And *I* feel the Spirit when he plays."

As he embarks on a career in music—a field in which he is still quite new—Kuha'ō continues to learn and grow in the gospel. And, of course, he plays in church on Sundays. Through it all, he relies on another gift from Heavenly Father—his testimony of the gospel—to both guide and ground him.

"I am touched by the Savior, Jesus Christ," he says. "I love Him so much. I want to stay close to Him, and I want the Lord to be with me. I know that the gospel is true and that President Thomas S. Monson is our prophet and leads us in the path of righteousness."

Despite his challenges, Kuha'ō knows he has been blessed with gifts from God. He also knows that one way to show gratitude for these gifts is to use them to bless others. **NE**