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MUSICAL GENIUS

By DAN SHINE

Come February, a group of fresh-faced, talented musicians will descend upon Ann Arbor. And once again, Aaron Dworkin will see himself in their faces.

In them he will see the struggles of his youth, the tug-of-war between after-school pickup football games and practicing his music.

He will see their black and brown faces and remember feeling ostracized while attending an almost all-white high school as an Afro-wearing, violin-playing black kid.



In 2005, at age 35, Aaron Dworkin received a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" for his efforts to help minority musicians.

And Dworkin will continue his mission of peppering mostly white orchestras and their audiences with musicians of color through his Sphinx Organization.

Dworkin, 35, founded Sphinx in 1996 after receiving his bachelor's and master's of music in violin performance from the

**AARON DWORIN
AND HIS SPHINX
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OF CLASSICAL MUSIC.**

University of Michigan. Struck by how often he was only one of a handful of minorities in the orchestra, Dworkin wanted to do something to change that. He created Sphinx to increase participation of African-Americans and Latinos in music schools, as professional musicians, and as classical music audience members, and to improve K-12 music education.

He gives credit to U-M for opening his eyes to composers of color and inspiring him to create Sphinx. He thought of the idea while still a student.

"One thing that solidified it for me was learning about minority composers," Dworkin says. "I remember going to a performance by Josh Bell with 4,000 people in the audience and only a handful were minorities. That crystallized in me the question, 'What can I do?'"

From that simple question, Sphinx has gone on to touch the lives of hundreds of young musicians, increasing the presence of blacks and Latinos in music

schools, orchestras, and classical music audiences. Last fall, it earned Dworkin a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship—the so-called "genius grant."

Sphinx sponsors an annual competition open to all junior high, high school, and college-age black and Latino string players residing in the U.S. The contestants are mentored by music professionals; they have the chance to perform with the Sphinx Symphony, which comprises past and current members of some of the world's top orchestras, and with faculty members from some of the leading music schools.

"I just wanted a competition where other students like me could participate, meet each other, and get resources to pursue our careers," Dworkin says. "We wanted to be able to showcase ourselves."

Besides the competition, Sphinx brings classical music into minority communities through two outreach programs. Sphinx musicians perform at schools, community centers, and libraries to expose new

Aaron Dworkin practicing. As a violin-playing black kid in a mostly white city, Dworkin felt ostracized. "Absolutely I wanted to be like other kids."

audiences—especially children—to classical music. With the help of sponsors, Sphinx provides full scholarships to prestigious music programs as well as top summer programs, loans instruments to those in need, and participates in a recital series at Borders bookstores.

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