



## CHILD PRODIGIES: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY GROW UP?

Andrew Halliburton | 23

began studying maths with secondary-school pupils at eight

Before Andrew was two, his parents realised that he could recognise numbers and letters when, in the living room of the family's flat in Dundee, he watched a popular TV game show involving maths and spelling tasks. His dad, Al, a driver, and his mum, Jean, a cleaner, were baffled. 'When he was young, I thought he was hyperactive,' Jean says. They took him to see doctors and they said the same. But they were wrong. Luckily, when Andrew was still very young, the **council** recognised his promise and provided him with a tutor and a computer.

At nine, his maths classmates were 13 and 14. 'It didn't faze me,' he says. He was big for his age – almost 1.8 metres by the time he was eleven – which was when he sat his Standard-level maths exam. Then, for the first time in his life, he felt pressured and 'started to panic'. His **peers**, teachers and parents all expected him to do well. Then there was the media. A picture of him sitting on a pile of textbooks is still on his parents' living room wall. 'Genius Andrew Halliburton' was how one of the biggest national newspapers referred to him. But for a shy boy, talking to the media was tough. 'I could hardly get my words straight,' he says of a TV news appearance. 'That built up a lot of pressure for me before the exam.'

He ended up with a grade two. He took his next level exams more slowly, got top grades and went straight to an applied computing course at university. For years, this had been the ultimate goal. It was a disappointment because it was less challenging than he had expected. He stopped studying at university after just the first year. After **dropping out**, he got a job at McDonald's®. Five years later, he continues to work there. He sometimes enjoys seeing the surprised look on customers' faces when he calculates the bill in his head. 'I always thought of myself as a bit of a nerd' – but he hates the word genius. 'I never liked the term.'

It shocks people, Andrew says, but he doesn't really like doing maths. He's going back to university in September, this time to pursue his real **passion**: computer game technology. 'I always thought my parents wouldn't accept that,' he says, but his dad Al is '**over the moon**'.

### Jennifer Pike | 20

became, at 12, the youngest winner of Young Musician of the Year

Jennifer is very aware that the number of musical prodigies whose early talent has ended in tragedy could make up a full orchestra. And she knows of exceptionally talented musicians of her age who have struggled to live up to family expectations and the pressures of the music business. In 2002, Jennifer, aged 12, became the youngest winner of the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. But then she avoided publicity to turn her mind to quiet but intense musical study and is now balancing studying at Oxford with 40 concerts a year around the world.

We have long been fascinated by musical prodigies – Mozart famously began composing at five – but great artists are often seen as **manipulated** victims. We also assume things come easily to gifted people. 'I'm very serious and very dedicated,' she says. Her career has meant sacrifices: she remembers not going away on holiday so she could play expensive, top-quality violins, and there are many things, from basketball to skiing, she would like to do but can't, **for fear of** injuring her hands.

The daughter of talented composer Jeremy Pike, Jennifer was taken to concerts as a baby. A few weeks before her fifth birthday, she picked up a violin. Her dad immediately **spotted** her natural talent. But her **drive**, she says, was her own. 'The number of young people I've met with somebody speaking for them, literally forcing them to do this ... I am lucky. I have a very inspiring and supportive family.' As a child, she always wanted to do more practice and learn to play better; it was she who had to push her teachers.

She went to an important music school aged eight, then, at 16 began to do a three-year postgraduate course in music. Last autumn, she started an undergraduate music degree at Oxford. 'I am really going for the whole life of being a student, not only to broaden those musical horizons, but really engage with young people. That will **enrich** my concert experience.' To be a concert violinist, she believes you have to experience 'normal' ('I hate using that word') life. When not practising, she watches old films and listens to jazz, Coldplay and even heavy metal on her iPod.

She doesn't feel gifted. 'I feel lucky to have this passion for music.'